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**ROBERTSON'S CHEAP SERIES.**

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**POPULAR READING AT POPULAR PRICES.**

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# **MADELEINE: A LOVE STORY.**

**By JULES SANDEAU.**

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**HIS PRIZE NOVEL, CROWNED BY THE FRENCH ACADEMY.**

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**COMPLETE.**

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**TORONTO:**  
**J. ROSS ROBERTSON, 55 KING-STREET WEST,**  
**SOUTH-WEST CORNER OF BAY-STREET.**

**1879**

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# MADELEINE.

## CHAPTER I.

### LOST IN THE WOODS.

Like almost all villages traversed by a royal road, Neuvy-les-Bois is a frightful market-town, muddy in winter, dusty in summer, in all seasons devoid of poetry and mystery. Such was its importance, moreover, that prior to the day at which this simple story commences, the inhabitants had no recollection of any public vehicle stopping within their walls. This disdain that the postillions and drivers had at all times affected towards Neuvy-les-Bois gives a poor enough idea of the quality of its wines.

It was in autumn, one Sunday, between mass and vespers. Grouped at the entrance to the hamlet, under a fiery sun, whose rays fell perpendicularly upon their heads, the natives gravely awaited the passage of the diligence from Paris to Limoges; for this was, on holidays, their only diversion,—short, it is true, but intoxicating, like all joys that are of brief duration. When they heard it coming in the distance, they solemnly ranged themselves upon each side of the road; then, when this great rolling machine, spinning along at the rapid trot of the horses between two rows of noses in air, of dull eyes and gaping mouths, had disappeared at a turn in the road in a cloud of dust, these honest people returned to their homes, their hearts overflowing with sweet satisfaction.

Now, the Sunday of which we speak, nothing foreshadowed a possible departure from the usual custom; but it was written on high that Neuvy-les-Bois should be that day the theatre of a wonder upon which this modest village, profoundly discouraged by a half century of expectation, no longer dared to count. Instead of spinning along like a cannon-ball as customary, the diligence stopped short in the middle of the road, between the two living hedges formed upon its track. At this unexpected spectacle, at this unforeseen stroke of fate, all Neuvy-les-Bois stood stock still, without even dreaming to ask one another whence came such a rare honour. Even the dogs, who were accustomed to run yelping after the ve-

hicle, inviting the kicks of the postilion, seemed to share the astonishment of their masters, and remained, like them, immobile and dumb from stupor. Meanwhile the driver had got down; he opened the door of the stage-coach, and upon this single word,—‘Neuwy-les-Bois!’ pronounced by him in a dry tone, a young girl descended from it, having for her whole baggage a little package under her arm. The paleness of her face, her eyes scalded with tears, her sad and suffering air, told her story more plainly than her mourning habit. The driver had already remounted his box, and the young girl had only time to exchange a silent adieu with her travelling companions. She was hardly more than a child, only more grave than one is at this age. When she saw herself alone upon that great road in the blazing sun, at the entrance to this miserable hamlet in which not a soul knew her, alone in the midst of all those faces that examined her with an expression of silly and suspicious curiosity, she seated herself upon a heap of stones, and there, feeling her heart fail within her, she hid her face in her hands and burst into tears. The peasants continued to regard her with the same air, neither breathing a word nor moving a step. Happily, in this group of rustics there were some women, and among these a mother who was nursing at the breast a little new-born babe. She approached the sorrowful young girl and remained some moments considering her with a hesitating pity; for although everything announced with this child forlornness, almost poverty, the natural distinction of her person retrieved the simplicity of her costume, and commanded, without effort, deference and respect.

‘Poor demoiselle,’ said she at last, ‘since you are here alone, at your age upon the highway, you must have lost your mother.’ ‘Yes, madame, I have lost my mother,’ responded the young girl in a sweet voice, in which a slight foreign accent appeared. ‘Alas! I have lost all, everything, even the patch of earth where I was born and where repose the bones which are dear to me. Nothing more is left me under heaven,’ added she snaking her head.



'Dear demoiselle, may God take pity on your pain! I see plainly, by your way of speaking, that you are not of our country. You come from a distance, no doubt?'

'Oh! yes, madame, very far, very far. I frequently thought that I should never arrive.'

'And you go?'—

'Where my mother, before dying, bade me to go. I knew, in setting out, that once at Neuville-les Bois, I should find easily the way to Valtravers.'

'You are going to Valtravers?'

'Yes, madame.'

'To the chateau?'

'Exactly.'

'You have lengthened your way, made-moiselle; the driver ought to have let you get out at the neighbouring town. It is the same—you have before you only three little leagues, and moreover you will be able, by going through the woods, to gain time. If you will allow him, my nephew Pierrot will guide you; but the heat is oppressive, and I am certain, my dear little one, that you have eaten nothing to-day. Come to our farm-house; you shall taste the milk of our cows, and, to set out again, you will wait the freshness of the evening.'

'Thank you, madame, thank you. You are good; but I do not need anything. I should like to set out immediately, and if it is not abusing the good nature of M. Pierrot—'

'Here, Pierrot!' cried the farmer's wife.

At this invitation, made in a tone which suffered no reply, a little imp separated from the crowd, and came forward with the cringing air of a dog that feels that his master calls him only to beat him. Pierrot, who, since morning, had been nursing the delicious prospect of taking, after vespers, his share in the play upon the church square, appeared only moderately flattered by his aunt's proposition. She repeated it in such a way that he judged it prudent to consent. She put the little bun-ble of the stranger under his arm, then, pushing him by the shoulders: 'Go through the woods, and be sure not to walk too fast for this young demoiselle, who has neither your feet nor your legs.' Thereupon Pierrot started with a sullen air, while Neuville-les-Bois, commencing to recover from its stupor, was lost in comments upon the events of this great day.

We suspect this village of Neuville-les-Bois to have been so named by antiphrasis. For Neuville (green), it is perfectly correct; but for les bois, (the woods), it is another affair. For my part, I know nothing more deceitful or more fallacious than these names of places,

or of persons that have a precise signification, and are as well formal pledges. I have noticed that, in such cases, persons and places rarely furnish that which they promise, and that, in general, what is lacking is precisely that quality which christening has given them. I have known Angelines who possessed none of the attributes of an angel, and Blanches black as little crows. As to places, without going further, Neuville-les-Bois, since we are here, has not a clump of elms, or poplars, or aspens to shield it from the winds of the north or the heat of the south. The circumjacent country is as bare and as flat as the sea coast, and in its vicinity, within the radius of a half-league, you would not find the shade of an oak. However, at Fontenay-aux-Roses they show a few sorry rose bushes.

But, as the young girl and her guide withdrew from the dusty road and penetrated into the country, the landscape gradually assumed greener and more joyous aspects. After two hours' walking, they perceived the woods of Valtravers undulating at the horizon. In spite of the recommendations of his aunt, Pierrot went at a brisk pace, without thinking of his companion. The possibility that he foresaw of being able to return to take part in the play, gave wings to this scamp. Although she had light feet and fine limbs, at intervals the poor child was forced to ask mercy, but the abominable Pierrot deafened his ear and piteously pursued his course. Going post-haste, he regarded with a mournful eye the shadow of the trees, that the sun began to lengthen enormously upon the surrounding sward; in the bitterness of his heart he did not dissemble that if he went as far as Valtravers it was an end to his Sunday joys. Once upon the edge of the forest an infernal idea passed through the mind of this young shepherd.

'There!' said he resolutely, putting upon the grass the bundle that he held under his arm. 'You have only to follow this wide avenue, which will lead you right to the chateau. In a quarter of an hour you will have your nose at the gate.'

Then this rascal prepared to escape; a motion retained him. Having detached from her girdle a little purse which did not appear very heavy, the young girl drew from it a little white piece that she courteously offered to M. Pierrot, thanking him for his trouble. At this trait of generosity, upon which he was not counting, Pierrot felt troubled. He hesitated; and perhaps he might have given way to this cry of his conscience if he had not discovered in the distance, on the plain, the steeple of Neuville-les-

Bois, like a church spire, on the beach.

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Bois, like the mast of a ship aground upon a beach. By an effect of mirage that fancy alone can explain, he believed he saw upon the church square a dozen comrades playing at pitch-pennies and quoits. At this, Pierrot held back no longer. He took the piece of silver, thrust it into his pocket and took to his heels as if the arch-fiend pursued him.

Passing under the branches, the young girl felt that sensation of delight that is experienced on going out of an oven and plunging into a bath of cool water. Her first movement was to thank God, who had sustained and protected her in the long journey that she had just accomplished, and to pray Him to render hospitable the door at which she was about to knock. As she did not doubt that the chateau was close at hand, she seated herself at the foot of an oak and speedily allowed herself to be diverted by the enchantments of the forest; for, indulgent and good-tempered, thou art the friend of all ages; thou consolest the aged; even children, when thou smilest upon them, forget a parent's loss. All around her was harmony, freshness and perfume. The slanting rays that through the foliage the sun sent expiring at her feet, admonished her that night was approaching. She rose and followed the path, expecting to see appear at every instant facade and turrets. But she found that this path which Pierrot said led to the avenue of the chateau, in reality only opened into a transverse path. The child listened attentively to hear some sounds of a neighbouring habitation; she heard only the dull hum which runs in the depth of the woods at the close of day. She ascended a knoll and saw around her only a vast ocean of verdure. Committing herself to the care of Providence, she continued her walk. When, disheartened and confused, she wished to return upon her steps, it was impossible to recognize the footpath through which she had passed. Although the sun had not yet left the horizon, the forest was already filled with shadow and mystery. The birds no longer sung, the moths beat the air with their downy wings; the sinister concert of the osprays commenced. It is especially in such an hour as this that despair, sorrow and solitude weigh with all their force upon the soul of the unfortunate. Discouraged, besides powerless to help herself, the poor little one threw herself upon the grass and her tears flowed afresh. She had untied the black ribbons of her straw bonnet; while she wept, the wanton wind played with her blonde hair that a last lingering ray gilded.

She remained in this position some min-

utes, overwhelmed with despair, when she perceived a beautiful horse of Limousin breed, which she had not heard approach, and which remained at the distance of a few steps, motionless as at the time of stopping; in the saddle was a rider who regarded her with the surprised air of a man who is not accustomed to such meetings, at such an hour and such places. She arose by an abrupt movement; then she was immediately reassured by the smiling kindness of the look thrown upon her.

'Monsieur,' said she, 'God has sent you to my assistance. If you are of this country, you must have already seen that I am a foreigner. For two hours I have wandered aimlessly in this forest, without being able to get out or knowing where I am going; perhaps you can do me the favour of putting me on my way.'

'No doubt, mademoiselle,' answered a voice almost as soft as that of the young girl; 'but then I must know where you wish to go.'

'To Valtravers, monsieur.'

'To the chateau?'

'Yes, to the chateau of Valtravers.'

'You could not have made a luckier application, mademoiselle, for I myself am going in that direction; and, if you please, I shall have the pleasure of accompanying you.'

At these words, without waiting an answer, the rider sprang lightly from his saddle. He was a young man in all the glow of the spring-time of life, slender, graceful, with an eye proud and gentle; over all he possessed an indescribable grace of bearing. His hair, shining like jet, in excessive luxuriance, curled naturally about his temples. Carelessly knotted around his neck, his cravat of gray silk streaked with blue, instead of concealing, only heightened the ivory purity of his complexion. A brown riding-coat clasped his slender and supple form; his white pantaloons fell in ample folds about a small boot, arched and slender, armed with a heel of shining and sounding steel. His bearing was at once unaffected and charming.

'Does this belong to you, mademoiselle, he inquired, pointing with the end of his riding-whip at the humble package resting upon the grass.

'Yes, monsieur, it is my whole fortune,' responded the stranger, with a sad smile.

The young man took the bundle and fastened it securely to his horse's saddle; that done, he offered his arm to the child, and they both proceeded in the direction of the chateau, followed by the beautiful and

docile animal, cropping here and there the young sprouts of autumn.

'So, mademoiselle, when I met you, you were puzzled, lost, and knew not what to do? I thank the chance that led me thither, for you were in danger of sleeping this night by the light of the stars, upon the moss of the woods.'

'I had resigned myself to it, monsieur.' And the young girl recounted the manner in which she had been mystified by M. Pierrot.

'M. Pierrot is a little rascal who deserves to have his ears boxed. And you are going to Valtravers? Then, perhaps, mademoiselle, you know the chevalier, or at least some one at the chateau?'

'I don't know any one.'

'Indeed!'

'Absolutely no one; but you, monsieur, you know M. le Chevalier?'

'Yes, certainly; we are old friends.'

'He is said to be good, generous, charitable.'

'Oh! very charitable,' replied the young man, who conjectured that it was a matter pertaining simply to the help of some unfortunate; but after a rapid glance thrown upon his young companion, he quickly repelled this idea, and clearly comprehended that this was not an ordinary *soliciteuse*.

'Mademoiselle,' added he, gravely, 'I inform you that M. le Chevalier's is the noblest heart that beats under heaven.'

'I know it. I do not doubt it: however, at this hour, it is very sweet to hear it affirmed anew. And little Maurice, monsieur, you must know him also?'

'What little Maurice, mademoiselle?'

'Oh! well, the son of the chevalier.'

'Ah! good, good!' cried the young man, laughing. 'Yes, certainly, I know him, little Maurice.'

'Does he promise to become some day good and generous like his father?'

'Marry! he passes generally in this vicinity for a good enough devil. It is not I who should wish to say anything ill of him.'

'I feel that he will love me like a brother.'

'I can assure you that, on his part, he will be delighted to see you.'

At this instant they traversed a clearing, and behind the walls of a park, the gates of which opened upon the forest, appeared a beautiful castle whose windows were illuminated by the light of the setting sun.

## CHAPTER II.

### AN ARTIST AT WORK.

The same evening, at the same hour, the

old Chevalier de Valtravers was seated upon the perron, in company with the old Marquise de Fresnes, whose neighbouring chateau was perceived at the bottom of the valley, through the yet green foliage of the poplars which skirt the Vienne. They were both talking pleasantly of the days gone by, for at their age life is only illuminated by that pale and soft reflection called remembrance.

The friendship of the marquise and the chevalier dated from a remote period. At the first stroke of the tocsin sounded by the worn-out monarchy, the Marquis de Fresnes had judged it convenient to go with his wife to spend a few months upon the borders of the Rhine, were it only to protest against that which was passing in France and to give to the throne of Saint Louis an authentic testimony of respect and devotedness. M. de Valtravers had decided to accompany them. It is well known what happened to these travels of a few months, and how these little excursions, that were represented at first as pleasure parties, ended for the most part in a long and hard exile. Our three companions counted so surely upon a prompt return, that they had barely taken funds enough to supply their needs a year. These resources exhausted, the diamonds sold, the trinkets converted into money, they gained Nuremberg quietly; here they were installed in poor quarters; their only concern was to live. MM. de Fresnes and de Valtravers were indeed in deep dejection. So, as it always happens, it was the wife who showed the example of resignation, of courage, and of energy. 'We shall work,' answered Mme. de Fresnes simply to her two friends, who asked with anxiety what part remained for them to take. She drew gracefully with the crayon and painted miniatures, she gave lessons and made portraits. Her beauty, her grace and her misfortune, still more than her talent, acquired for her in a short time a select and numerous clientele. The two gentlemen who had commenced by declaring it derogatory, and raising their voices at seeing the marquise at work, ended, will or nill, in perceiving that they were passably provided for without doing anything, and that after all it was the marquise that, as the common saying is, brought the water to the mill. The marquis found no occupation; but M. de Valtravers comprehended that to remain thus with folded arms was to bid farewell to all pride and dignity.

But what employment could he find for his faculties? to what industry could he apply his idle hands? The idea came to him to teach French; the necessity of preliminary self-instruction cut short this fine project. After studying and revolving all projects in

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his own mind, the chevalier was at last obliged humbly to confess that he was good for nothing but to go and get himself killed in the army of the Conde. He, therefore, prepared seriously, but without enthusiasm, for this, when one day he was wandering sadly enough through the streets, he stopped mechanically before the toy-shop window in which he saw, among other little objects of turned wood, jumping-jacks very artistically worked, and a good number of those spinning tops,—delights of childhood and glory of Nuremberg. It might seem that for a gentleman emigrant, utterly ruined, and having long passed the period of jumping-jacks and German tops, this spectacle would have had nothing that could exalt the imagination and inspire an intellectual transport. Nevertheless, it happened that after a few minutes of silent contemplation, M. de Valtravers appeared to undergo something of that emotion which Christopher Columbus suddenly experienced when he saw rise upon the bosom of the ocean the shores of the New World; and Galileo, when he felt our little terrestrial globe, stopped by ignorance and kept motionless for six thousand years in space, moving and circling around the sun.

M. de Valtravers was born in 1760. Now, thanks to the Emile of Rousseau, it was the custom at that period, among the upper classes of French society, to complete every education by apprenticeship at some trade. The president came from above. In 1780, the King of France, who was the most honourable man in his realm, was also the best locksmith. It was intended that the great nobles should be acquainted with some mechanical art. Likewise that the great dames should themselves nurse their own children. Generally this was practised without foresight and without seriousness; these played at work, those at maternity; the latter yielded to the caprice of the day rather than to the demands of nature; the former did not suspect, in using the file or the plane, that the hour was approaching when young noblemen would be obliged to become workmen, and that it was acting prudently in thinking immediately of creating for themselves plebeian titles.

At the sight of these toys, before which chance, or rather the instinct of a mysterious vocation, had just conducted him, M. de Valtravers remembered that he had learned to turn ebony and ivory. Three months later, he passed at Nuremberg as the Benvenuto Cellini of turned woodwork. In fact, in less than three months his skill in fashioning wood was unrivalled. He excelled in making toys; his tops were generally very tasty; but what shall be said of his nut-

crackers, which, from their delicacy and finish of details, were absolutely miracles of design! He manufactured in ivory what were regarded as genuine ornaments. Fashion had something to do with it, and, as the paintings of Mme. de Fresnes enjoyed already an unparalleled popularity, it was found, during two years in the old German city, every individual of good birth must pose before the marquise, and that nobody could eat a filbert without the intervention of a French emigrant.

It may be believed that, quite different from certain people, our two artists did not take their success seriously; if they set their talents in public at a high price, they made great progress in friendship. Having worked apart, they reunited at evening, and there were then, between her and him, scenes of insane gaiety, when she showed upon her easel the broad face of some huge Nuremberger, while he drew from his pocket a half-dozen nut-crackers that he had turned during the day. They laughed like children, and did not perceive that it was to the work that they owed their gaiety—to the work, which had already rendered them better and happier than they had ever been in the happiest time of their prosperity. As to the marquise, he deemed to earn one's bread the act of the rabble, and that a gentleman who respected himself would rather die like the Roman Senators in their curule chairs, than stoop to live like beggars, by work. He expostulated privately with his wife, regarded the chevalier with sovereign contempt, and did not trouble himself to conceal it. That which especially exasperated him was to find them occupied and in good humour all day, while he was literally dying from that gloomy and profound ennui which is a never-failing concomitant of inaction. Notwithstanding all this, he ate with great appetite, appropriating without scruple the profits of the association, and showed himself in many things as puerile, as futile and more exacting than if he had still been in his chateau on the banks of the Vienne. It was at the dinner hour that his bile was most freely exhaled.

'Well! marquise,' cried sometimes the chevalier, 'do us the favour to tell us where you would be without the portraits of the marquise?'

'And without the nut-crackers of our friend?' added the marquise laughing. M. de Fresnes shrugged his shoulders, spoke of soiling his escutcheon, asked forgiveness for his wife from the shades of his ancestors, and lamented at not seeing Bordeaux wine upon his table.

At length, when they were assured of their



physical well-being, Mme. de Fresnes and M. de Valtravers could obey a sentiment more disinterested and more poetic, which had been gradually and unconsciously developed in them. They had passed, without being aware of it, the steps which lead from trade to art, like Jacob's ladder, mounting from earth to heaven. The marquise essayed, in reduced copy, some pictures from the old masters. She succeeded; and her miniatures after Holbein and Albert Durer were eagerly sought after. On his side, the chevalier entered seriously upon sculpture-in-wood; he distinguished himself and became one of the most eminent artists of this kind beyond the Rhine. They show, to-day, in the Cathedral of Nuremberg, a chair of his make. Executed perfectly, the ornaments are not wholly of irreproachable taste, but the principal piece, which represents St. John preaching in the wilderness, is one of the most beautiful that Germany possesses, and would be able to sustain comparison with the carved wainscots seen at Venice, in the church of San Giorgio Maggiore.

Besides the pleasure that it contributes, however humble and modest it be, Art possesses these infallible and precious qualities: it elevates the heart; it enriches the mind; it opens to thought larger and serener horizons. This is what happened at least in the case of the marquise and chevalier. Both succeeded through it, little by little, in breaking entirely the circle of narrow ideas in which their birth and education had imprisoned them. They recognized the aristocracy of work and the royalty of intelligence; like two butterflies escaped from their chrysalis, they went out of their narrow and limited caste to enter triumphant into the great human family. All this time, wasted away by ennui even to a skeleton, the marquis continued to be consumed with ineffectual desires and sterile regrets. One beautiful day he restored to God whatever he possessed of soul; his wife and friend mourned him as a child.

Some months after,—this was in 1802,—at the invitation of the First Consul, they repassed the Rhine and returned joyously to their country, regenerated like themselves. Since a long time, they had succeeded in comprehending and accepting the new glories of France; touching this brave soil, they felt their hearts throb and sweet tears moistened their eyes. The best part of their domains being left national property, they readily obtained re-possession; so that the years of exile which had flowed by were, for them, only a long dream; but, different from Epimenides, they went to sleep aged and awakened youthful. As soon as he was re-established in the hall of his fathers, the

chevalier hastened to summon a beautiful and chaste creature whom he had loved in Germany, whom he married, and who died in giving birth to a son. This child grew up between his father and Mme. de Fresnes, who were wholly devoted to him, and who continued to live philosophically in their retreat doing good, enjoying their pleasures, scarcely hearing the noise of the world, stranger to every ambition. Of all habits, that of labour is the rarest and most imperious. The marquise painted as a pastime, while the chevalier, rising every morning at daybreak, planned, carved and polished pear-wood walnut and oak. He had undertaken to magnificently renovate, with his own hands, the worm-eaten wainscots of his manor; perhaps also, by a pleasant return to his first successes, he turned now and then some nut-crackers, which he presented to the daughters of his farmers. Reading, riding, the delights of a friendship whose charm had never grown old, and the education of young Maurice, absorbed the remainder of the day, ever too short when one is busy and when one is loved.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A NEW DEPARTURE.

One evening then, seated near each other, these old companions were enjoying themselves in remounting the current of the days that they had descended together, when they perceived, issuing by a path of the park, the two young people that we left at the gate. Arrived at the foot of the perron, the young girl ascended the steps slowly with a composed air, although apparently moved. The marquise and chevalier rose to receive her. She drew from her bosom a letter that she piously pressed to her lips; then she gave it to M. de Valtravers, who was examining with a sentiment of gentle curiosity this child that he saw for the first time. The old gentleman broke the seal and read. Standing, her thin arms resting upon her bosom, calm in her grief, dignified in her humility, the foreigner remained, the eyes bent upon the ground, under the look of Mme. de Fresnes, who was observing her with interest, while a few steps distant the young man who had brought her stood a discreet witness of this silent scene.

'MUNICH, July 18th, 18—

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my suppliant arms, in the name of her who was my sister and the woman of your choice. Alas! how cruel have been the trials of this house that you have known so prosperous! Where have vanished the joys of that hearth by which you have sat in the past? The grave has taken from me all my kindred. My husband was unable to outlive his prosperity, and I, miserable, in my turn, I now am dying. I die, and I am a mother; this is to die twice, O God! When you read these lines, sole treasure, unique heritage that I have been able to leave her in departing, my daughter will have but you upon earth; when you hold in your hand this paper wet with my tears, my child will be before you, alone, arriving from afar, overwhelmed with grief and fatigue, without other refuge than your roof, without other support than your heart. Oh! for the sake of the sweet bond that was dear to you, and that death, no doubt, has left unbroken, for the sake of this Germany that was hospitable to you, and that was for a long time your country, for the sake of my family, become yours—for the sake of the adorable creature too soon torn from your love, and who adjures you here through my voice, oh! do not reject my dear deserted one! Receive, warm in your bosom the dove fallen from her nest. And you, whom I know not, but whom I loved so frequently to unite with my daughter in the same sentiment of tenderness and solicitude, son of my sister, if thy mother has given thee her soul, thou wilt also be good and fraternal to my darling Madeleine. Protect her, watch over her when thy father is no more, and forget not ever, young friend, that the orphan whom Heaven sends you becomes sometimes the tutelary angel of the house that is opened to her.

'Come, daughter, come to my arms!' exclaimed the chevalier, when he had finished reading the letter; 'be welcome, my child, under the roof of your old uncle. Were it not sorrow that brought you I should call this day thrice happy, and your arrival would be a festivity to us. Marquise, this is my niece,' added he, stroking with his hands the head of the child; 'Maurice, this is your cousin—this is a young sister that comes from your mother's country.'

The orphan passed from the arms of her uncle into those of the marquise. Mme. de Fresnes had lost an only daughter, taken away, in her bloom, at about the age of Madeleine; now, in the minds of all those unfortunate ones who have suffered this dreadful bereavement, especially in the minds of mothers, there is an irresistible

tendency to discover, when even they have no existence, plain and striking resemblances between the child removed by death and the greater part of those that they encounter upon their way: touching illusions of love and grief which transform all these fresh faces into so many living portraits of the adored being that no longer exists! The marquise therefore naturally felt attracted towards this pale creature, which appeared to her as an image of her daughter. There were the same eyes and the same look, the same grave and sad charm, peculiar to beings who have undergone early ordeals or condemned to premature death. So disposed at the outset, it might be inferred that the vivid and spontaneous spirit and generous nature of Mme. de Fresnes, which time had not impoverished, must espouse with enthusiasm the fate of the young foreigner. She pressed her to her bosom, lavished upon her the tenderest names, covered her with kisses and caresses. Then it was the young man's turn. 'What! my cousin, it was you!' said she, laughing through her tears. 'It was you, little Maurice! I imagined you must be only a child like myself.' Maurice very cordially embraced her: it was all the more pleasant, as he had not even suspected the existence of his cousin. Meanwhile the chevalier gave orders, was animated, had an eye upon everything, and to each of his servitors said, with emotion: 'We have another child! Assuredly, that evening, if she could see the reception of her daughter at Valtraversa, our heroine's mother in Heaven could not but be content.'

The installation of Madeleine changed nothing in the routine of the chateau. She was a devout child, simple, modest, already serious and reflective, occupying little room, making no noise, the most part of the time silent and bending over some needle-work. In a few days she had made herself agreeable to all by her gentleness and goodness. As to her appearance, we must say nothing of that; its character is well known at that ungrateful period at which one has passed the graces of childhood and not yet attained those of youth. She was not exactly beautiful, and we dare not affirm that she promised to become so. Before pronouncing upon such delicate questions, it is always prudent to wait; the more so, as in this season of transition a mysterious work is accomplished, in which ugliness is as often transformed as the too-preocious flowers of beauty are blasted. Such as she was, the marquise and the chevalier loved her with vivid tenderness, and the life of this child was divided

between the two neighbouring habitations, which, to speak properly, made but one. Far from having been neglected, her education had been pushed far enough for her to continue it herself, and finish it without needing extraneous assistance. She spoke French with purity, almost without accent. Like all Germans and too many French, alas! she understood music thoroughly, and what is unfortunately rarer, she did not misuse it. The marquise and chevalier were delighted to hear her sing tyroliennes of her country; but these airs, which carried them back to their days of exile and poverty, cruelly recalled to her, her mother and her country, both irrevocably lost, and frequently the poor little one was interrupted by her tears and sobs. For Maurice, at the end of one, or two weeks at the most, during which he felt obliged to occupy himself with his cousin, and do with her the honours of the country, hardly appeared to perceive her presence. He was twenty, and possessed all the ardours and all the transports of his age; other cares already engaged him. This young man had grown up in the greatest freedom, doubly spoiled by his father and by the marquise, who knew nothing in the world more beautiful or more charming than he. A private tutor had instructed him a little in Latin and Greek; at the same time M. de Valtraversa, with whom the love of wood-sculpture had become a true mania, had initiated him in the secrets of his art. The good old chevalier wept with pride and joy when he saw his son at his side squaring, turning, polishing, and promising to surpass his father. Maurice, on his part, appeared to enjoy this innocent pastime; but one day, here is the misfortune! he asked himself if there might not be something here below besides the chevalier, the marquise and sculpture-in-wood. At this indiscreet question that was addressed to him by turbulent youth, uneasy and about to break forth, the response was not long in coming,—it was youth itself that answered by an explosion.

There are some tender and poetic natures veiled in their morning by a light cloud; there are others, on the contrary, more vivacious and energetic, whose dawn glows with all the fires of mid-day. With the former, the first trouble of the senses and the imagination that are excited, reveal themselves without disturbance and become translated into sorrowful reveries; with the latter, violently, in tumultuous agitations. Maurice participated in both these natures. They saw him at times, sad, preoccupied, dreamy; then suddenly seized with irritable and nameless ardors, restless, impetuous, ebullient,

even somewhat passionate, and knowing not to what wind he owed the savage energy that consumed him,—remaining affectionate to his aged father, overflowing with kindness to his old friend, good to all, loved by every one, merely having for diversion besides sculpture-in-wood, of the hereditary manor eternal histories that he endured since twenty years, he asked himself with bitter irritation if his whole existence must for ever occupy itself with turning box-wood, with fashioning oak, and at evening, at the corner of the fire-place, to listen, with feet upon the andirons, to the interminable stories of the times of emigration. While waiting more, he hunted a *toute outrance*, scoured the country and killed horses.

It was in the midst of this explosion that Madeleine's unexpected arrival occurred. One can easily judge of what importance would be, at such an hour, in the destiny of this young man, the apparition of a young girl of fourteen or fifteen years, timid, reserved, silent, without too much beauty or grace. He concerned himself about her hardly more than if she had not left Munich. He went away at sunrise and did not return until nightfall; also he frequently passed a whole week, either in the neighbouring city or in one of the chateaux of the voinage. If he saw Madeleine in the morning at her window, he unceremoniously bade her good-morning, and that was all. During dinner, he addressed her, at intervals, without looking at her, with some insignificant phrase. When she sang her tyroliennes, as it was for the chevalier and marquise an occasion which they embraced with eagerness, to speak of Nuremberg and to recall, the one his nut-crackers, the other her miniatures, Maurice stopped his ears and never failed to escape at the first note. One evening, however, as he stood near her, he could not help being struck by the luxuriance of her hair—indeed, of rare magnificence. He made in a loud tone some remark upon it, raising familiarly with one hand the luxuriant mass of fine blonde hair that covered the head of the little German. The poor child was so little accustomed to see herself the object of the attentions of her cousin, that she blushed, was troubled and trembled like an aspen. When she attempted, by a smile, to express her recognition, Maurice, having a presentiment of some tyrolienne, had already escaped. Another time, returning from the chase, he offered her a pretty pheasant that he had snatched living from the jaws of one of his dogs.

'What! my cousin, do you sometimes think of me?' asked the young girl quite moved.

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Maurice had already turned on his heel. It was not because he was displeased at the presence of the orphan under the paternal roof. Far from it! If he had all the ardours of youth, he had all its noble and generous instincts. The thought of disputing the part that Madeleine might some day have in the chevalier's will never entered his head. Let it be said, in passing, to the glory of youth, such shameful calculations rarely enter the hearts of twenty years. Maurice was ready to share with his cousin as with a sister; and, if he did show himself more attentive or more tender to her, it was very plainly because Madeleine had forgotten to come into the world fifteen or twenty months sooner.

The marquise and the chevalier had not failed to notice, from the first, the sudden change which was passing in the habits of Maurice, whose tastes had hitherto been so simple and whose humour so facile. They were, in consequence, disturbed without too well understanding it. They had been young in a time when youth, scattered here and there in petty distractions, in elegant frivolities, hardly suspected that dull discontent and profound ennui that were destined to be, later, the torment and martyrdom of a whole generation. Although raised in the retreat, in the interior of the country, Maurice had undergone in his isolated position the influence of new ideas. Ideas are living forces mixed in the air we breathe—the wind carries and sows them at all points of the horizon; and, whatever one may do to escape these invisible currents, however far he keeps himself aloof, he is penetrated, he is impregnated; he is always the progeny of his century. That which chiefly surprised the old chevalier and marquise was not the need of absorbing activity that they explained naturally as the result of the warm blood and impetuosity of youth, but the sombre melancholy in which were swallowed up almost always these ardours and transports. What could they understand, indeed, of the malady of an epoch in which gaiety, exiled from souls of twenty years, would no longer occur under the white hairs of the aged? By dint of thorough study and co-operation, they succeeded, however, in recognizing that the existence that Maurice had hitherto led was neither fruitful nor enjoyable; and that, despite the incomparable charm of sculpture-in-wood, they ought not to be astonished that a young heart was not wholly absorbed in it. This was the opinion of the marquise; the chevalier corroborated it. 'What was to be done, however?' They spoke at first of marriage; but the remedy was found a little too violent; besides, the

marquise made the just observation that they did not marry any longer at twenty; and that, different from the practice of the past, marriage had become less a beginning than an end. In short, after ripe reflection, it was decided that they would send Maurice travelling for two or three years—to Paris first, then, at his choice, in Germany or in Italy—in order to complete his education by thorough knowledge of men and things. This programme was not much more vague than the greater part of those which the provinces trace out for their sons every year, before putting the bridle upon the neck and leading them into Parisian life.

Some time later, on an autumn evening, a year to a day after the arrival of Madeleine, the chevalier, his son, and the marquise were assembled in the chateau of Valtravers. The horse that was to bear Maurice to the neighbouring village, through which passed the mail coach, was waiting saddled and bridled at the foot of the perron. It was the hour of parting. A departure has always something of sadness and solemnity, even when it does not pertain to a sorrowful separation. The chevalier appeared painfully affected; the marquise illly concealed her emotion; Maurice himself felt moved, and when his old father opened his arms to him, he threw himself in tears upon his breast as if he embraced him for the last time. Madame de Fresnes clasped him to her heart with emotion. Lastly, the servants of the house, the oldest, those who had seen him born, embraced him as their child.

Time flew; Maurice must put a stop to all these embraces. It was only at the last moment, when about to put foot in stirrup, that he remembered Madeleine. He looked around for her; and astonished at not seeing her, he was going to call her, when somebody told him that the young girl, gone out since several hours, had not yet returned to the chateau. Committing a few affectionate messages, to be addressed to his cousin, to the charge of the people around him, he moved off at the measured step of his horse, not without turning several times to salute once more with a tender gesture the excellent creatures who followed him with their eyes. Arrived at the gate of the park, about to break into a gallop, he hesitated, like an eagle upon the edge of his eyrie before launching himself into space. He recalled the happy days that he had passed under the shadow of this pretty manor, between the cares of the marquise and the tenderness of his father. He fancied he saw through the moving foliage the gracious phantom of his youth, that regarded him with sorrow and strove to retain him. He fancied he



heard charming voices saying to him—'Ingrate, where art thou going?' His heart sank and his eyes filled with tears; but his destiny urged him on. He plunged into the forest through which he must pass in order to reach the village.

In a few brief minutes, at the same place where he had met her a year previously, on the same day, at the same hour, Maurice perceived Madeleine seated and in reverie. Just as in the past year, the orphan had not heard the noise of the gallop upon the moss; raising her eyes, she saw her cousin looking at her. It was the same frame and the same picture. Nothing was changed; but in the place of a scarcely-developed, slender and sickly child, without beauty and grace, there was a white figure around which was commencing to hover the golden host of sweet dreams of youth. It was not yet the full-blown flower; but the bud had half-opened its envelope. It was not the full daybreak, but the incipient dawn, when Nature, near to waking, trembles into life under the first kisses of the morning. Maurice sprang from his horse. He hastened to embrace his cousin and to bid her adieu; then, regaining his saddle, he pursued his way, never suspecting, alas! that he was leaving happiness behind him.

After he had disappeared at a turn in the path, Madeleine turned towards the chateau. When she entered the *salon*, the chevalier was seated at the corner of his deserted fireplace. She went and leaned her elbows sorrowfully upon the back of the fauteuil in which the old man sat in a dejected attitude, and remained some moments contemplating him in silence.

'My father,' said she, finally bending her blonde head towards him, 'my father, there is left you a daughter.'

The chevalier smiled and drew her softly to his heart.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE FORTUNES OF LOVE.

After the departure of Maurice, Madeleine became all the joy of Valtravers. It was she who enlivened with evergrowing grace the roof that the presence of this young man no longer animated. She was seen like a young Antigone, redoubling, around her old uncle, her pious and touching cares; although with a sadder heart and a more reflective mind than usually belonged to her age, she understood how, in amusing her, to forget herself, and transform her natural gravity into smiling serenity. She accompanied him on all his excursions, loitered around him

when he worked in his workshop, read his papers aloud, did not oblige him to repeat again the stories of emigration, and especially never failed to go into ecstasies before all the pieces of carving with which this indefatigable artist loaded every corner and recess of the chateau. At the same time, she was the loved daughter—and very truly lovable—of the marquise, who instructed her in painting, and was overjoyed to develop all the sweetness that God had implanted within her. In this manner between, these old people, the child increased in talents and amiable virtues. Three years after her arrival Madeleine was a good and beautiful creature, not, it is true, of that accomplished and conventional standard of beauty to which seem irrevocably consecrated all the heroines escaped from the brains of romancers and poets. Neither tall nor short, her form was not absolutely as pliant as a reed. A critic, enamoured with the plastic side of Art, would indeed have found something to object to in the oval of her face. Her hair, of an indecisive brown, would not perhaps have perfectly satisfied the highest ideal in the world, having neither the black of ebony nor the golden glisten of the silky corn. If her skin had that dull whiteness of the camellia that defies the effects of sun and air, her eyes were not of a very pure or very bright azure. If her teeth, ranged like the pearls of a necklace, had the limpid light of mother-of-pearl, her mouth was a little too large, the lips were a little too full; lastly, the eyelashes in drooping fell not upon the cheek like the fringes of a gonfalon; and, to speak the truth, the line of the nose only recalled vaguely the royal nose of princely races. As it was, however, her features and entire person formed a *suave ensemble*, in which the imperfections of detail united and harmonized so well that each of them appeared to be an increased seduction and charm. I prefer these beauties less correct than sympathetic, in which the heart is captivated before the eye; and which, without possessing anything that dazzles or fascinates at the first view, are ever prepared to awaken, in those who understand them, some unforeseen grace and new enchantment. Although occupied with domestic administration, and charged with watching over the good order of the house, the precocious wisdom and reason that she possessed did not exclude from the mind of Madeleine either refinement, poesy, or even a certain romantic and dreamy turn of mind that she had received alike from her mother, from Germany and from God. She was, on the whole, a pleasant girl to see, in all the bloom of youth and health, of rich and expansive

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One can easily form an idea of the position of Madeleine between the chevalier and marquise. She was the joy of their old age, and like a sweet beam of light that illuminated the end of their days. Mingling in unison, these three existences flowed in slow and peaceful waves, and nothing fore-shadowed that the transparent limpidity would ever be altered. It nevertheless happened that these pure waves were troubled.

The letters of Maurice were at first full of charm and poesy, fresh and fragrant as so many bouquets collected in the dew of the fields. It is in this way that they write in that happy age, too quickly stolen away. At the fading hour when life already commences to decline, have you ever found at the bottom of some old drawer some of the letters of your youth? Have you been surprised to read them? In reading them, have you seen pass through your tears the image of your happy years? By a bitter return upon the present state of your heart, have you asked yourself if it was indeed from that same source, to-day near to exhaustion, that could have issued all these treasures of enthusiasm and of faith, of grace and of virtue, of expansion and of love? It was letters of this character that Maurice wrote at twenty.

The days of poet were therefore days of festivity at Valtravers. When she saw the rural agent coming in the distance, Madeleine ran to meet him, and returned triumphant to the chateau. Ordinarily it was she who read aloud the letters of her cousin. Whenever she found her name there, which did not always happen, one might have seen her bosom heave, and a rosy light, almost imperceptible, coloured an instant the alabaster of her face. If there was no question about the little cousin, which happened frequently, she appeared neither surprised nor saddened, only one might have remarked that she was graver and more silent the rest of the day. These letters of Maurice caused every fibre of the good chevalier to vibrate in unison, who could therein follow through the outbreaks of impassioned tenderness, the developments of an elevated spirit and of a vivid intelligence. Moreover, some old friends that he had in Paris wrote to congratulate him, vying with each other in praising his son and relating his prodigies. Everything was going for the best; the days of return were already spoken of.

But at the end of a year the letters of our young friend became rarer and rarer, and shorter, less and less affectionate and tender.

Vague in thought, constrained in expression, they betrayed evidently a great trouble of sense and soul. The little colony commenced by being afflicted in silence; it ended by being seriously alarmed and by complaining. To the indulgent reproaches that they addressed him, Maurice could only oppose evasive answers. The term fixed for his sojourn at Paris had long since expired; but Maurice showed no disposition to set out, as had been decided, either for Germany or for Italy. When the chevalier urged it, at first he did not answer; then, pushed to extremity, by the insistence of his father, he answered in language little contained, in which impatience under the rein was plainly exhibited. If the old friends wrote again it was in order to express regret at not seeing Maurice as in the past. Finally some shells came hursting now and then, in form of lettres de change, upon the honest manor, struck with a dreadful gloom. These things were not accomplished in a week, nor even in a month. Altogether, three years had transpired in coming to the point we mention.

This was not all. If, thanks to the more or less specious pretexts with which Maurice sought still to colour his excuses, M. de Valtravers had been able to entertain some illusions upon the conduct of his son, the good souls with which the departments abound would not have failed to deprive him of them. As he was a perfect gentleman, in the best acceptation of this word, become so common since the thing is so rare, — generous, accessible to all, charming mind, noble heart, loyal character — the chevalier naturally found many enemies in the country; not among his peasants, who loved him, but, for example, in the neighbouring city, in which some bailiffs and barristers, frequenters of taverns, leaders of liberalism and vermin of the province, did not pardon him for returning into his domains and making himself beloved therein. Now the whole city knew for a long time the truth concerning the existence that young de Valtravers led at Paris; for the province is a good mother that never abandons her absent sons; she follows them through life with an eager, curious and jealous eye, every ready to crush those who stumble in order to be avenged upon those who rise. In general, if you wish to throw despair and consternation into that human locality that has seen you born or grown up, arrive with head erect and by the right road to success, to honour or to fortune. If you wish, on the other hand, to spread a lively joy, go astray, that your virtuous fellow-men may weep

upon your ruin. When our fellow-men weep for us, it is only because they have well wished to laugh.

Hence, Maurice, in a short time, became for the town in question a wonderful subject of public scandal and interior satisfaction. Traitorously concealed under the mantle of pity, hatred took joy at heart. The chevalier was spared neither charitable advices, nor compliments of hypocritical condolence; anonymous letters did the rest.

The marquise devoured her tears in silence; the chevalier disappeared from view. All happiness was banished since a long time from under the roof of these old friends. Madeleine went from one to the other like a consoling angel. She defended Maurice, and spoke still of the approaching return of the prodigal son; but she herself no longer believed it, and frequently hid herself to weep in solitude. I was plainly perceived that the good chevalier was seriously struck, for, commencing to neglect his wood-carving, he soon wholly abandoned it. He no longer had any inclination for anything; Madeleine alone possessed the secret of unbending his forehead and bringing a pale smile upon his lips. He said to her at times: 'I ought indeed, poor child, to occupy myself before dying in assuring your dear destiny; for, from the way he is going, it is not Maurice that will watch over you when I am no more.' 'Never mind, never mind, father; do not worry about that. I wish only to love you; I shall need nothing when you are gone. See, I am large enough to watch over myself. I have good courage, thank God! and what you have done in our Germany, you and Madame the Marquise, why, my uncle, I shall do in your France. I shall work, why not?'

The old man smiled softly, shaking his head. One day the young girl took it upon herself to write in secret to her cousin. It was a lovely letter. Maurice did not answer. As to the chevalier, he no longer wrote; scarcely did he permit, in the latter part of the time, anyone to speak of his son in his presence. As he grew feeble and feeble, and as he felt his end arrive, he determined, however, to send toward this unfortunate young man a last cry of love and despair.

The response was slow in coming; they waited three months; finally it arrived. It was, that absent from Paris for about a year, traveling no one knew where, nor in company with whom, Maurice had not received until his return the last advices of his father. God be praised! this young man was returning to better sentiments; his letter showed it. They saw revealed in it the distress of a lacerated soul, which by a supreme effort

was striving to raise itself. He embraced the knees of his old friend; he covered with tears and kisses the hands of the marquise; Madeleine herself was found mixed with the tears of his repentance. He asked only a few weeks to finish breaking bad associations. In a few weeks he was going to set out; he was going to bid an eternal adieu to the world that had led him astray; driven by the tempest, he was going to re-enter the port, never more to leave it. 'Paternal roof, I am then going to see thee again! I am then going to return to the soft nest of my childhood! Amiable companions of my youth, I am then going to clasp you in my arms; you also, little cousin, well-grown, very beautiful, no doubt!' Exalted by these vivid images, his imagination found for an instant the grace and freshness of youth. Unfortunately, when this letter arrived at the chateau, the chevalier had been dead twenty-four hours. The lamp of his life was extinguished at evening near the window where they had rolled his fauteuil, between the Marquise and Madeleine, who each held one hand.

The same day of the funeral, after the earth had covered all that remained here below of that excellent being that chance had made nobleman, and that work and poverty had made man, the marquise led away Madeleine, orphan for the second time.

'My child,' said she, 'thy work is not accomplished. Thou yet must assist me in dying, and close my eyes.' They threw themselves in each other's arms and remained in a long embrace.

'Ah!' cried the marquise, 'since you have restored my daughter to me, it is right that I should hold the place of mother.'

From this day, Madeleine lived at the chateau de Fresnes. A week before his death the chevalier had put in the hands of the marquise a holographic last testament, by which he bequeathed to his niece his *metairie* of Coudray, having a value of eighty to a hundred thousand francs. This testament was couched in affectionate and touching terms; all the exquisite delicacy of the testator was therein revealed in a few charming lines. When, in order to tranquillize, doubtless, Madeleine with respect to her future, Madame de Fresnes confided to her this precious gage of the tenderness of her uncle, with a movement of pious recognition the young girl pressed it to her lips and to her heart; then having torn it, she sacredly slipped the pieces into her bosom.

'Oh! my child, what have you done?' cried the marquise, apparently dismayed, in reality charmed.

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answered Madeleine, smiling. 'I know no-  
thing of the life of Maurice ; I feel only that  
this young man must need all his resources,  
and that it would be a poor recognition of the  
beneficence of the father to deprive the son  
of a part of his inheritance. Be assured, my  
friend, that what I have done is well done.  
You yourself would not have acted other-  
wise in my place.'

'But, poor child, you have nothing. I  
counsel you not to place too much dependence  
upon the self-denial of Maurice. I gone,—  
and I have not long to remain on earth,  
dear child,—what will become of you ?'

'That which happens when one has no-  
thing but courage and strong will. Am I not,  
thanks to your lessons, as rich as you your-  
self were on arriving at Nuremberg ? I hope  
that He who came to your assistance then  
will not abandon me now, and I shall make  
my own nest as you have made yours.'

'Ah ! well, you are a brave girl, as good  
as beautiful,' added the marquise, taking  
suddenly between two white and thin hands  
the head of Madeleine, which she kissed  
again and again upon the forehead and  
cheeks.

They waited day by day, Maurice, upon  
whom the death of his father had fallen like  
a thunderbolt. Weeks, months flowed by ;  
Maurice did not come. They learned soon  
that he had sent his power of attorney, and  
that his agent was occupied in regulating  
the affairs that the dead occasion for the  
living. He had at once written to his cousin  
a letter without any effusion, although conven-  
tional, in which he offered her, with neither en-  
thusiasm nor grace, a large part in the inheri-  
tance of his father, precisely that *metairie*  
of Coudray which the orphan had generously  
just renounced—so, indeed, Maurice unwill-  
ingly happened to offer to Madeleine that  
which she gave him. The young girl  
answered simply that, retired with Madame  
de Fresnes, she absolutely needed nothing.  
The young man did not insist. What had  
he done, however, with his good resolutions ?  
Restrained by respect and remorse, perhaps  
he dared not yet affront the sight of a tomb  
which he could, without great rigour, accuse  
himself of prematurely opening. They ap-  
plauded him for this reserve ; they did not  
doubt that he would bring later to Valtra-  
vers the offering of his expiations.

While at Fresnes they nursed innocently  
this last hope ; a short distance away mort-  
gages were falling like hail. A year had  
hardly passed since the death of the cheva-  
lier, when the knews spread in the country  
that the domain and chateau of Valtravers  
were to be sold at auction. The marquise  
and Madeleine flatly refused to believe it,

and protested against the calumny, as they  
had ever done when the matter in hand was  
to defend Maurice against the reports of the  
province. One day, however, as they were  
walking together in the forest, talking of the  
cruel and dear absent one—for, while blam-  
ing, they still could not help loving him—  
they perceived through the bars of the  
gate, grouped here and there upon the  
steps of the perron, a number of the  
servitors and peasants, who were talking  
earnestly among themselves, and regard-  
ing each other with an air of con-  
sternation. Impelled partly by a pre-  
sentiment, partly by curiosity, they both ad-  
vanced towards the manor, to which they  
were accustomed to make frequent pilgrim-  
ages.

'Oh ! Madame la Marquise ! Oh ! Ma-  
demoiselle Madeleine !' cried they all to-  
gether as soon as they had approached. 'Oh !  
what a great misfortune for us all ! Heaven  
has fallen upon our heads. This is the ruin  
of our poor lives.'

'What is it, my children ? what has hap-  
pened ! what is the matter with you ?' asked  
Madame de Fresnes.

'See ! see ! Madame la Marquise. What  
must our good master in heaven, M. le  
Chevalier, think ?'

With a bewildered air they went up to the  
door and facade of the chateau, dishonoured  
by immense placards with the seals of the of-  
ficers. 'To doubt was no longer possible ;  
they were notices of sale.'

Madeline bowed her head, and two tears  
rolled silently down her cheeks. Till this  
moment she had not well understood what  
was called in the vicinity the dissipations and  
excesses of Maurice. Therefore, in her own  
conscience, she had ever absolved him. Now,  
all her noble instincts revolted within her—  
cried piteously that this young man was lost.  
The marquise, on her part, felt all the blood  
of an indignant heart mount to her forehead,  
—that heart, ever young and burning, which  
age had not chilled.

'No, my children, no,' she cried resolutely,  
'while I live, this domain and chateau shall  
never become the prey of the black shoal of  
sharks. I will never permit so great a joy to  
be given to the fools and rascals. Therefore  
be tranquil, my friends. You shall remain  
just as in the past, you in your farms where  
you were born, you in this house where you  
have grown up. Nothing will be changed in  
your existence ; take my word for it, and go  
immediately to console your wives and chil-  
dren.'

She, therefore, instantly sent for her no-  
tary, and put into his hands the certificates  
of her stocks that represented the greater part

of her fortune, by means of which he must on the day of sale outbid all competitors. The marquise awoke, therefore, one fine morning legal proprietress of the domain of Valtravers, which did not change her habits, since she continued to live with Madeleine in the chateau of Fresnes, where her daughter had died and where she also wished to die.

Alas! this was the last act of the amiable and beloved marquise. For a long time she fancied herself gently but irresistibly drawn by the impatient soul of her old companion.

'You see,' said she at times to Madeleine, 'we were never separated. Without speaking of the marquise, whom you never knew, I am certain that my poor chevalier is wearied there alone waiting for me. It is ungenerous in me to have kept him waiting so long. But I am somewhat embarrassed to know what to answer when he asks me for news concerning his son.'

The eve of her death, waking from a long slumber, Madame de Fresnes turned towards Madeleine, who was seated at the side of her couch, and said: 'I just had a strange dream that I wish to relate to you. I saw Maurice at the bottom of a dreadful gulf. Hideous reptiles were crawling and hissing at his feet, and the unhappy child was exhausted by the desperate efforts made to remount to the light of day. I wanted to run to his assistance, but I felt my feet chained to the ground, and I was stretching towards him my powerless arms, when all at once I saw you coming in the distance, calm and serene. Having arrived at the edge of the abyss, and removed the white scarf that encircled your neck and floated about your shoulders, you threw it smiling to Maurice, who seized it, and was drawn forth without effort, and appeared to me radiant and transfigured. That is my dream: what do you think of it, my daughter!'

A pale ray beamed upon the lips of Madeleine, who remained pensive and did not answer. The marquise died on the morrow, or, more exactly, she expired in the arms of her young German; her beautiful soul passed away gently in a last smile.

'Little one,' said she quite gayly some hours before her end, 'I have not forgotten you in my will. Since you have a taste for painting, I have bequeathed you my colours and brushes. Try with those to find a husband.'

In fact, upon opening the will Madeleine saw that Madame de Fresnes was not jesting. Only, to this little legacy the marquise had added the domain and chateau of Valtravers, leaving still a good share to her natural heirs, who had, however, no need of it.

In this manner this young and beautiful

girl was left in absolute possession of that house where, one autumn evening, five years previously, she had presented herself, her whole fortune consisting of a little bundle under her arm.

## CHAPTER V.

### MISTRESS AND MISERY.

Less elated with her new position than one might believe, Madeleine re-entered religiously into the chateau, in which the domestics, who had seen her grow up and who loved her, received her as if a young queen. She lived as in the past, modestly, unostentatiously, solely preoccupied with the beings confided to her care. Her authority was revealed only in the profusion of good deeds that she spread around her; except for this, it would have been difficult to infer any increase of fortune; except for this, she might still have passed for the little orphan sheltered by the charity of her uncle. She had declared at the outset that she intended that nothing should be changed in the former routine of the house, and that all the customs of the good chevalier should be respected, precisely as if he were not dead and liable to return at any instant. As to herself, she did not wish any other apartment than the little room in which had melted away the last days of her childhood and the first days of her youth. Whenever they came to receive her orders upon something of some importance, she never failed to consult with her people to ascertain what the chevalier would have done in similar circumstances. If it was necessary to admonish or chide any one (which latter happened very rarely), she always prepared the way by some such phrase as this: 'I think, my children, that this is what your excellent master, M. le Chevalier, would have said or done.' She reminded herself often that the best way to honour the memory of the beings that we have loved is to do nothing which would have pained them, and to reflect, before acting, upon what they might have thought in like cases. Finally, whenever she spoke of Maurice, it was only with respect, and as of a young prince whose kingdom she was administering during his minority. She was less queen than regent.

The report of her prosperity having spread in the country, suitors were not slow in presenting themselves. Valtravers became a sort of Mecca or a kind of holy sepulchre assigned to the fervent piety of all the celibates of the department. During several months a long file of these pilgrims might have been seen wending their way to the

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holy spot to make there their devotions. Small country squires, ruined lords, noble-  
 men's sons, boys young and old; some in  
 broken-down carriages, some on foot, some  
 on horseback,—all flowed hither to recite  
 their characteristic *pater noster*. Al-  
 though serious and reflective, Made-  
 leine possessed that good and art-  
 less gaiety which proceeds from a pure  
 conscience, from an upright heart and  
 healthy intellect. She replied to these  
 faithfuls that it was an edifying spectacle to  
 see a poor orphan become all at once the ob-  
 ject of so pure a culte, of so disinterested a  
 zeal. She had, indeed, heard in Germany  
 that France was the native country of pious  
 souls and generous hearts, but she had never  
 hitherto suspected that they pushed the re-  
 ligion of misfortune to such an extreme.  
 Moved even to tears, she had only one re-  
 gret, which was, she found herself so happy  
 in her humble condition that she did not  
 wish to exchange it even for the rare honour  
 which they offered her. Thus she dismissed  
 in order these devoted and pious individuals.

However, Madeleine had always seriously  
 answered in this same sense, whenever the  
 cavalier or marquise had urged her to  
 marry. This child had decided that she would  
 not marry. If such was her inclination, I  
 approve it, having never understood the  
 petty ridicule that is attached to spinsters.  
 Would it not appear that a husband is a com-  
 modity alike so indispensable and rare that  
 one cannot get along without it, and at the  
 same time one never runs the risk of losing it?  
 There is scarcely any ugly or poor creature  
 who has not met some one upon her way  
 through life; now, I venture to think that she  
 who has resigned herself to live in solitude,  
 has done so rather than consent to a mes-  
 alliance of heart and soul.

Freed from her suitors, Madeleine con-  
 tinued to live in her retreat, devoting her  
 days to the cares of her little empire, the  
 performance of charity and the culture of  
 the arts she loved. She had exhumed from  
 the library of her uncle some old books that  
 served to ripen her intelligence. In her  
 smiling gravity, in her calm and serene  
 beauty, she represented at twenty-one grace  
 and reason, good sense and poesy, like flow-  
 ers that imbibe moisture from the earth  
 through their roots, and drink in at the  
 same time through the balmy calyx the dew  
 of heaven. She was also religious, and  
 every Sunday she went to hear mass at  
 Neuville-Bois. She visited freely that  
 wretched village which had seen her so help-  
 less, in which she now had her poor and  
 orphans who blessed her name. After leav-  
 ing the church she rarely forgot to visit

the good farmer's wife who had charitably  
 offered her to taste the milk of her cows.  
 As to M. Pierrot, she was never able to suc-  
 ceed in taming him. Either because in her  
 presence he felt overwhelmed with remorse,  
 or else fearing she might reclaim the piece of  
 silver that he had earned so well, the little  
 scamp took to his heels whenever he saw  
 her coming.

When the funeral tints that death left  
 behind it were dissipated about Madeleine,  
 when time had changed into joyous shades the  
 spectres of her grief, this young girl might  
 have been called happy, were it not for an  
 incessant preoccupation which banished hap-  
 piness from her bosom. 'What was Maurice  
 doing? What had become of him?' Since  
 the death of his father, he had given signs of  
 life only by ever-increasing bursts of dissi-  
 pation. Having come into possession of Val-  
 travers, yielding to the impulse of an adora-  
 ble delicacy, which only elevated minds can  
 divine without difficulty, and which com-  
 mon natures strive vainly to comprehend,  
 Madeleine had written to him to excuse her  
 good fortune. This letter, which he ought  
 to have borne respectfully to his lips, unless  
 he were already dead to every sentiment of  
 virtue, remained without response. And  
 yet, despite so many reasons for driving him  
 from her heart, whatever had been done and  
 whatever had been said, Madeleine still  
 looked after this unfortunate young man  
 with a troubled and anxious thought; she  
 saw him again, in her dreams, just as he ap-  
 peared the autumn evening when, for the  
 first time, he had opened the hospitable door  
 to her. She was then only a little girl;  
 but, at this age, which we men regard only  
 as an escape from the nursery, who knows  
 what is already germinating in these hearts  
 of fifteen years? Girls have no childhood;  
 and, however young be his wife, unless he  
 has grown up with her, the husband ought  
 not to flatter himself with having received  
 the first fragrance of her soul.

Omniscience, that sees the diamond form-  
 ing in the bowels of the earth, and the pearl  
 growing in the depths of the ocean—Omni-  
 science alone could have known what passed  
 in the breast of that child since the first  
 meeting. Madeleine had long refused to be-  
 lieve that Maurice had fallen as low as peo-  
 ple affirmed. Long she had defended him  
 against all, even against his so indulgent  
 father, against the good marquise. Finally,  
 when, having seen the days of the cavalier  
 shortened, and the domain of his ancestors  
 sold at public auction, she was obliged to  
 submit to the evidence; but this young man  
 was none the less left the inner thought, the  
 hidden romance of her life. These preoccupu-

pations were redoubled in intensity since Madeleine, having returned to Valtravers, found at every step vivid traces and reminiscences of that youth whom she had known so impetuous, but yet so charming, in his zeal. In the room that he had occupied, nothing was changed since his departure. In it she passed frequently long hours, alike sad and ennobling. In the park she sat under the trees that he had planted. When she walked through the court-yard of the chateau, his hunting dogs ran to lick her hands. If she went to the banks of the Vienne, above the hedges she perceived the horses that he had mounted, and that now pastured in freedom in the grassy meadows. The whole forest was filled with his single image. He had himself carved the oaken wainscot of the dining-room.

This was not all : there was at Valtravers a good and brave creature, that had never left the manor, in which she was born almost at the same time as Maurice. They had both drank the same milk, which in our provinces always establishes a kind of fraternity between children. The chevalier, who loved her, had caused to be given a fair education to this girl, who had the rare sense not to feel vain of it, and remained simply what nature had made her,—neat, active, alert, prepossessing, frank-spoken, pleasing the sight by her beautiful health, and recalling from afar Dorine and Marinette. She had hardly any defect except that of being at times somewhat impetuous in the expression of her sentiments, by nature exalted. It was not love that she possessed for her foster-brother, it was genuine adoration. She saw simply that he had disposed of his inheritance according to his taste, and was only astonished at one thing, that is, that people should permit themselves to be astonished at it. If, instead of having sold it, he had set fire to the chateau of his father, Ursule would have unhesitatingly justified him. He might have roasted his farmers by way of pastime, and she would have at the most only considered it a little singular. She had at once conceived for Madeleine an unparalleled affection. As soon as she learned that a little German orphan, Maurice's cousin, had come to the chateau, she ran, threw herself in her arms and overwhelmed her with a deluge of tears. She was beautiful, especially when the domestics or peasants dared to doubt in her presence the virtues of the young chevalier. A slap in the face for this one, a box on the ear for that one, she did not scruple about it ; she had a strong hand ; the hardest dared not provoke it. Madeleine was pleased to

talk with her. What attraction impelled her ? It is not necessary to say. As Ursule, on her part, was happiest in speaking of her young master, every thing went for the best. There was hardly a day passed in which Madeleine did not call her. At one time, both seated in the embrasure of a window, the one engaged upon embroidery, the other mending, the conversation turned upon Maurice. Ursule recounted the childhood of this young man. Always, whatever the one did not allow herself to hear, the other was careful not to utter. In ascending the current of souvenirs, they arrived gradually at the present. Ursule represented her foster-brother as a spotless lamb, and predicted his approaching return. Madeleine shook her head. However, the *metairie* of Coudray had not been sold ; Maurice had not therefore bidden an eternal adieu to the country.

This last hope was broken. One day she learned that Coudray was for sale ; and as misfortunes never come singly, the same day an unforeseen event threw trouble and consternation in the little colony. A lawyer came to notify Madeleine that a nephew of Madame de Fresnes, that was supposed dead several years, had suddenly appeared in the country, that he had contested the will of his aunt, and that from this day litigation would commence.

Some time later, Madeleine was walking one evening in the avenues of the park. She walked slowly, alone, sad and preoccupied. Although it was impossible to foresee the issue of the lawsuit entered upon, although she felt an aversion to the ignoble troubles that affairs of this kind drew in their train, yet it was not the care of her fortune that agitated her. Her first motion had been to proudly leave the chateau ; if she had resolved to defend her rights, it was only through respect to the memory of her benefactors. Now, whatever happened, she had done her duty. The rest did not trouble her. Of what value to her henceforth this manor to which Maurice would never return ? She had ever considered it only as the property of her cousin ; during nearly three years, it had been the dream of her life and the joy of her soul to think that a day would come when the prodigal son would be reinstated by her hands in the domain of his ancestors.

Meanwhile, what was he doing ? Turning into a path Madeleine saw him before her. It was indeed he, it was Maurice ; but so pale and so changed, that one might have called it the spectre of this young man. He was truly only the spectre of himself. Madeleine, bewildered with joy and astonish-

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ment, wished to throw herself in his arms; her emotion recoiled before the icy attitude of this sombre figure. Having remarked that the evening was pleasant, he offered to escort his cousin to the chateau. While Madeleine trembled upon his arm he walked with an assured step. He mounted without hesitation the steps of the perron. But when he entered the salon and Madeleine said to him—'It was here that your father died!' he trembled and hid his face in his hands. 'Ah! you are here, you!' said he to Ursule, who suffocated him with her embraces. Having spoken a few common-places to his cousin, he related that, about to set out for a long journey from which he hoped never to come back, he wished to see again for the last time the house of his father, and to bid a last adieu to all that he had loved. At the end of an hour he retired to his room, the young girl having forbidden him to seek other lodging.

'Oh, misery! oh, misery!' cried she, bursting into tears and sobs.

Poor Ursule seemed transformed to stone.

Maurice, in coming to Valtravers, had decided to remain only a few hours; he must soon set out and return to Paris, in order to put his affairs in order and complete the preparations for the long voyage he meditated. At the insistence of his cousin, he consented to remain a few days. During this time, Madeleine could observe the ravages that time had made in this young man, less, however, in his figure than in his heart and mind. She perceived him frequently sombre, melancholy, satirical, rarely affectionate and good. He, however, appeared preoccupied with the interest of his cousin. One evening, in order to acquit his conscience, he ran through the papers of the lawsuit, estimated the affair favourably, and declared, without knowing anything of it, the decision was certain in advance.

'That concerns you, my cousin,' said the young girl, smiling.

'Me, my cousin!'

'Don't you know that, since the death of your father, this domain has not changed masters?'

'Oh, good Heavens, my cousin,' replied Maurice, in an indifferent tone, 'you would do that out of generosity—uselessly. I must tell you that I might have all the chateaux of France without being thereby happier.'

'You are then unhappy, Maurice?' asked the young girl, in a voice so sweet and sad that it might have softened a heart of stone.

'I, cousin! I am the happiest of men.'

On the following day Madeleine learned that Maurice had set out without bidding her adieu. It is true that, upon reaching

Paris, he wrote to her to excuse this sudden departure. Two months later he wrote again. His preparations were completed; in fifteen days he was going to start. Under a jesting exterior, these two letters bore evidence of the bad state of his mind. The latter especially breathed a sombre discouragement and gloomier hopes. At the first, Madeleine felt sick at heart; at the second, she was struck with terror.

During this time, the litigation was going on; all the devout pilgrims whose vows Madeleine had rejected, already rejoiced in the bad turn that the affairs of the little German were taking. Madeleine alone was not concerned about them.

## CHAPTER VI.

### TIRED OF LIFE.

Just as he had announced, Maurice was ready to set out on a very long journey—so long indeed, that of all those who have attempted it not one has yet come back, and at the hour of departure the most intrepid have felt their hearts chill and their foreheads pale with fear. All his arrangements were made; it remained for him only to bid an eternal adieu to that world which he was going to leave for a better, as far as assured, and if it be permitted to believe it without presuming too much upon the goodness of God. Maurice had arrived here by a gradual but slow descent. Its history is so well known, so common, so many times related by voices more eloquent than ours, that it is only necessary to sketch the principal features.

Look at this young man, at twenty. He enters into life that he had hitherto seen only through the enchanting dreams of the solitude in which he had grown up. His childhood passed away in the shadow of the paternal roof, in the depths of valleys. Nature lulled him upon her bosom. God hath surrounded him only with noble and saintly examples. Look upon him as he advances, escorted by all the laughing pageant that youth draws after it. Grace resides upon his forehead; illusion dwells in his bosom; like an expanded flower under the limpid water, beneath his glance was revealed the beauty of his soul. He believed naively, spontaneously, in all honest sentiments, in the never-ending affections that are perpetuated on the other side of the grave, in the vows exchanged in the light of serene nights. He had only one ambition—love. Ah, while you ask under what wind balmy enough such precious treasures will succeed in expanding, while you enquire who is the



Beatrice whose hand is pure enough to collect this charming innocence, all has already become the prey of some vicious and corrupt heart. Beatrices never arrive in time, and when at last the angel presents herself, there is left only to glean where the demon has harvested.

Such was the first experience that Maurice made of the world and life. Some women—they are rare—have received from Heaven the gift of ennobling and fructifying all those who approach them: even grief that comes to us from them is blessed. Others, on the other hand, more numerous, have the fatal property of those waters which petrify in a short time all objects committed to their care. Woe, ah! threefold woe to the confiding and credulous young man who is caught by the fatal charm, too often surrounding these deluding creatures! Maurice lost here the better part of himself; and as it is characteristic of feeble and ardent souls to touch at all extremes, he went on to outrage every noble impulse within him. If there be noble hearts that strengthen and purify themselves in the blood of their wounds, there are others that become soured and corrupted by them. Maurice thought of nothing better than to go headlong into that species of railing philosophy which consists in mocking every virtuous principle in man, and in considering as chimeras all that does not enter into the circle of material pleasures: philosophy of the ante-chamber, formerly reserved to valets in comedies, for the use of Frontin and Gros-René, and which certain wits of our day have pretended to make the doctrine of reason, the theory of good taste and refinement. The sole occupation of these abortive souls seems to be to degrade at every turn whatever relates to human nature, considering the words enthusiasm and poetry, heroism and love, country and liberty, to have been created only to serve for the amusement of their mediocrity. Maurice soon became one of the most fervent disciples of this mocking scepticism. Once upon this incline, the descent is speedy. At first one readily persuades himself that it is only amusement, and indeed, for a period it is only amusement. Whatever may be said to prove the contrary, one has always in himself, in all their efficacy, those sentiments which abound in all situations. It is thought that when the opportunity or necessity comes they will reappear, and at the first serious summons none of them will be wanting. Relying upon this, they do not perceive that by these boastings of vice, by these parades of scepticism, the moral sense is degraded; it is discovered, some fine morning, that in

consequence of listening to mockery and persiflage, those sentiments which were counted upon as a *corps de reserve* have silently struck their tents and stolen away.

Maurice turned from time to time towards Valtravers; but too many bonds clasped and enmeshed him from all sides. Once entangled in the brambles of life it is not easy to escape. The letters from his father secretly irritated him; although tender and very maternal, the remonstrances of the good marquise made him smile with pity or bound like a wounded lion. It was quite the fashion, among the youth of that period, to hold in very small honour the ancient weakness of venerating Lacedæmon. The Restoration was ended; they entered upon that social crisis which proclaimed itself to be on the point of changing the face of the world, and I am not aware that any epoch has pushed farther than this, the contempt of all rule and the absence of all respect. Maurice was unconsciously impregnated by that spirit of revolt that circulates in the air, and towards which the ardour of his blood and the impetuosity of his character naturally impelled him. Ah! how he was already removed from that young man whom we have seen gifted with so many graces and illusions, affectionate, charming, good to all!

These poetic and fragile organizations are like glass, soft to the touch when it is intact, but trenchant when it is broken!

Meanwhile Maurice walked the streets of Paris, anticipating his revenues, and cultivating his intelligence just enough not to have the appearance of having recently come from the Congo. Different from great minds, which, when they are mortally wounded, bury themselves in solitude to heal in silence or end by dying, he had recklessly plunged into the whirlpool of vulgar distractions. Idleness and the ennui that succeeds to the tempests of passion involved him deeper and deeper every day. Strange remedy for the wounds of the soul, which consists in bathing them with the filth of gutters! He who does not know how to respect his grief is to be pitied! He shows, in outraging it, that he does not deserve to be happy. Beautiful, generous, prodigal, he was not long in making a name in that equivocal world into which have fled the morals of the regency, without its elegance of manners and charms of good breeding. They spoke of his duels and his horses, of his debts and successes. From one descent to another, at last he found himself face to face with debauchery. He regarded the monster without paling, and threw him what remained of his youth to devour.

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It was in the midst of these disorders that the last letter of his father surprised him. This letter was beautiful and touching, devoid of vain anger or puerile declamation. Maurice, in reading it, felt, under the pricks of remorse, all his noble instincts awoken within him. At this august and dear voice his sobs broke forth, tears flowed from his eyes, a cry of love went forth from that heart long silent and obdurate. He would break, he was breaking, he was tearing himself away from the fatal embraces, when he learned that his father was dead. Too often in the abundance of youth, we forget that the days of our parents are numbered; we postpone from month to month the performance of those filial obligations, and almost always it is upon a tomb that we bring with our tears the offerings of a lingering piety. Maurice was overwhelmed. Fever and delirium ensued. Under pretext of consoling him, his friends, or rather his accomplices, pressed around his couch, so indeed the blow that seemed intended to break the bad ties only availed to tighten them more closely than ever. What would he do at Valtravers? After vain efforts to master and reclaim himself, he found it easier to abandon himself to the muddy stream that swept him away. It is hard to ascend that current so easy of descent; this is because the gulf to which it leads has strange fascinations, unknown to those who have navigated only in pure and peaceful waters. Meanwhile, more and more menacing, realities began to annoy him. Embarrassments multiplied around him, for disorder of the feelings leads directly to all disorders. In order to appease the hydra of debt and fill up the abyss yawning beneath his feet, Maurice was forced to consent to the sale of the chateau where he was born, and the domain of his ancestors. Soon, he came by degrees to mingle with that group of old rones that are seen at Paris, without patrimony, without prospects and without position, playing high, living in great style, eclipsing with their unexplained fortune the honest people whom they despise, and who, I am thankful to say, in their turn repay them with like contempt.

Whatever one may do to escape it, there inevitably comes an hour when that pitiless creditor, Destiny, knocks at our door with memorandum in hand. In vain, when she presents herself, to think of renewing the scene of Don Juan and M. Dimanche; one must, will or nill, comply and forthwith balance his accounts with her. It has been said and repeated that man is the plaything of chance. I know not, for my part, closer or more inflexible logic than that of human

life. All its events are bound together as the links of a chain; for him who knows how to fathom the premises and patiently await the conclusion, it is certainly the most rigorous of syllogisms. So, for Maurice, that which must happen arrived: the fatal hour surprised him driven into a cul-de-sac, without other opening than suicide or dishonour.

His was a perverted, but not a perverse soul. In the worst of his excesses, there might have been discerned in him the stamp of his origin, and, although singularly altered, the imprint of a native dignity. In a world where poverty of education stalks in the midst of all the furniture of luxury—in that mob of parvenus among whom, as in the *Précieuses ridicules*, are seen grooms giving themselves airs of marquises, this young man had borne in himself, at least, refined and chivalrous manners, an adventurous and proud spirit. In the profound night where he had gone astray, he had shed a noble light. Between the two issues that were offered, he did not hesitate. Besides, for a long time his moral suicide was accomplished: nothing was left him but to die; and the bitter ennui that consumed him, and, above all, the contempt in which he held himself, must inevitably impel him sooner or later towards this vulgar denouement, easily foreseen in an epoch in which it was not rare to meet young people of twenty years wearied of life.

His resolution once taken, too proud even in his debasement to consent to leave the world like an insolvent debtor who flees the bailiffs, he sold his *metairie* of Coudray, which he had hitherto refrained from touching, solely in view of Madeleine; for, although he had kept in his breast only a vague image of his cousin, he had nevertheless foreseen the possibility that this child some day might fall into poverty. Reassured on that point, since he knew that Madeleine possessed in legal right the domain of Valtravers, in order to pay the recent debts he had contracted, he parted with the sole and last remnant of the paternal heritage; then, by that vague impulse of emotions that are never extinguished in us, he wished to see again, before dying, the spot of earth where he had been born.

That return to the place of his nativity, upon which he had counted perhaps to revivify youth in him, served only to show in all its nude sterility the poverty of his existence. Scarcely did he recognize the paths through which he had so many times passed with the marquise and chevalier; he saw again without emotion that lovely Nature to

which he had been so fondly attached, which had beheld him young and beautiful like himself.

When he came to seat himself upon the threshold of the house in which his father was born, not a tear fell from his dry eye. Just punishment for those soiled souls that, having outraged all that is sacred and venerable on earth, try some day to quench their thirst at the spring of pure emotions and find the source exhausted.

To believe this young man would be regenerated at the sight of that suave creature that we call Madeleine, would have been to strangely delude and prepare one's self for bitter deceptions. Gross Levite of the religion of sensual beauty, what could he understand of that virgin loveliness?

Not only, in seeing her, was he not moved by such abundant grace; but moreover, after having examined her curiously as he might have done a statue or picture, he perceived that his cousin decidedly lacked character. All that he experienced in her presence was reduced to that vague sentiment of awkwardness and constraint that almost ever debauchees experience when they chance to meet a chaste woman. Long bled upon all such emotions as those of parting, he departed one morning as he came, without saying anything to anybody.

Upon his return to Paris, he hastened to put his affairs in order. Already, before his departure, he had closed his house, dismissed his servants, sold his horses. The price of the sale of Coudray paid his last debts. This done, he found himself in possession of a thousand crowns, which was more than necessary to arrive at the end of the journey. Free from every care, he withdrew, and decided to pass in solitude the few days that remained to him on earth. If he had lived badly, he wished at least to die well—that is to say with dignity, for he believed in nothing, and the unfortunates are not preoccupied more with God than man. The image of Madeleine herself only illuminated with a pale reflex the anticipated evening of his life. He did not even once think with melancholy of that gentle being. In his loose egoism, he did not call to mind that a lawsuit put seriously in question the fortune and destiny of his cousin.

The hour approached. If he waited longer, it was not because he weakened or hesitated. But after so many fatigues and vain agitations, he wished to enjoy the calm and silence which envelop the frail human soul, when, ready to depart, its task accomplished, it feels it has nothing more to do here below. All his preparation seemed to announce the

firm resolution of an approaching end. He had written to Madeleine his last adieu. His pistols were loaded; more than once he had placed upon his forehead their lips of bronze, as if to feel the icy kiss of death. Finally, and thereby could be seen that the supreme moment was approaching, he busied himself in destroying all vestiges of his past life, that he might leave only a dead body to the comments of curiosity.

## CHAPTER VII.

## SAVED!

He left Paris in the morning and returned at evening, having wandered all day in the woods of Lucienne and Cella. Life had never so heavily pressed upon him—he had never so profoundly felt the emptiness of his heart, the exhaustion of his faculties. Having returned to his rooms, he took a small case and opened it; the letters that he had received in better times were presented therein, jumbled promiscuously together, without more order or care than he had used in the adjustment of his whole life. Family letters, love letters, withered flowers, faded ribbons, locks of hair, all the poetry of his youth was there. As he raised the lid with a hand less reverent and less anxious than it would be pleasant to state, though inaccessible since many years to sensations of this nature, yet he could not help thrilling at the odour of happy days that escaped from this box like a gust of spring-time.

Among the letters that he re-read, before offering them one after the other to the flames, chance introduced the very one that his cousin had written to him not long before, unknown to the chevalier and the marquise, and that he had left unanswered. For the first time, he read it carefully from beginning to end, smiling here and there at the naïveté charm that he discovered therein. When the sun had consumed all, Maurice drew from the empty case a medallion that he regarded for a long time with a sombre air. In touching it, he had shuddered as if in contact with a viper. Recognizing it, he was seized with a nervous spasm, his forehead became clouded with gloom, and sinister lights darted from his eyes, a little while since dull in the depths of their orbits. It was the portrait of the first, of the only woman that he had loved. The face was beautiful, of a melancholy and fatal beauty; examining it attentively, one was reminded of the fabled Sphynx proposing her heart as an enigma to the passers-by, and devouring the madmen who presented themselves to solve it. After several minutes of fierce con-

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templation, with a movement of hatred and  
anger, Maurice threw from him the small and  
fragile ivory, dashing it in pieces against the  
fire-place. Overcome by this last effort, he  
sank upon a divan, his pale face hidden in  
his hands. He remained in this posture about  
an hour. Raising his head, he perceived,  
standing near him, Madeleine, who was  
regarding him with a sweet and sorrowful  
smile. He thought at first it was a halluci-  
nation of his over-excited senses; for an in-  
stant he fancied it was the Angel of Death  
come to assist him; but he was no longer a  
man to be arrested long by such poetic im-  
ages.

'You! it is you, Madeleine! What wish  
you of me? What do you demand? What  
whim, or rather what motive, brings you?  
At all events, it is not your place here.'

'Yes, my cousin, it is I,' responded the  
young girl, who appeared neither troubled  
nor surprised by these words pronounced in  
quick succession in a short and almost brutal  
tone. 'It is I, or rather it is we,' added she,  
'for your sister, Ursule, is here, in your  
ante-chamber. I could not allow the excel-  
lent creature to be separated from me. Per-  
haps it will not be displeasing to see from  
time to time her good and honest face.'

'What idea has possessed you to leave  
your home?' abruptly demanded the young  
man. 'What have you come to seek in this  
infamous city? You don't know that the  
very air you breathe is poisoned! You are  
not aware that they die in this place of sor-  
row and of ennui. Ursule and you, both in  
Paris! Poor children, depart immediately;  
return to Valtravers, remain in the shadow of  
your woods.'

'But, my cousin, you are assuming a little  
too much,' replied Madeleine, gently; 'in  
your turn, you don't know that the lawsuit  
that I must so certainly win, I have lost be-  
yond appeal; you are not aware that Valtra-  
vers no longer belongs to me, and that I am  
absolutely at the same point as on that  
evening when you met me in the heart of  
those woods whose shadow you commend to  
me.'

'You have lost your lawsuit! Valtravers  
no longer belongs to you!' Maurice ex-  
claimed with a sensation of terror.

'Bless me! yes, my cousin. But there is  
no need of impeaching human justice. Ah! Heaven is my witness that I do not covet  
riches. It pains me only to think that the  
last wish of our dear and well-loved marquise  
has not been respected. I must also say  
that I was flattering the hope that that beau-  
tiful domain and chateau which fell to me  
would, later, be returned either to you or to  
your children.'

'My children will not need anything, and  
it is not I that it concerns,' replied Maurice  
in a tone more and more crisp and cutting.  
'Why have you not accepted that *marquise*  
of Coudray that I offered you? Why did you  
let me sell it? Why did you not then say that  
you might some day find yourself without  
resources? That day has arrived; what is  
going to become of you?'

'Don't scold me, my cousin. You clearly  
perceive that I do not doubt your heart,  
since it is to it that I have come to appeal.  
I avow that I have not hesitated an instant.  
I said to myself: "My cousin is henceforth  
the only support that is permitted me to rely  
on in this world. He knows that I have  
tenderly loved his old father, and, taking  
everything into consideration, am a good  
girl, worthy perhaps of his interest. I know  
him to be generous. I shall go and put my-  
self under his protection. I am certain that  
he will not refuse me." Hence, I made a  
little bundle as formerly when I left Mu-  
nich; then, having knelt upon the threshold  
that had been so hospitable to me, having  
bidden a very long, a very sorrowful adieu  
to the house in which I had grown up, to  
those sweet places that I was never more to  
see, I set out, and here I am. Maurice,  
have I not done well? Do you think that I  
ought to have acted otherwise?'

Maurice did not answer. Seated upon the  
divan in front of Madeleine, he regarded her  
with an air of melancholy stupor, like a man  
who knows not whether he is asleep or  
awake. No great degree of perspicacity was  
necessary to guess from his face what was  
passing in his mind. Madeleine did not ap-  
pear to perceive it. She added, however,  
with agreeable dignity:

'Above all, do not fear, my cousin, that I  
shall ever be a serious embarrassment to  
your existence. I shall not interfere in any  
manner with your habits or your liberty. I  
have simple and modest tastes; my poverty  
will hardly be a burden to your fortune. I  
only implore you to renounce, for some time  
at least, that long journey that you medi-  
tate. You would not wish to abandon me  
alone and without protection in this great  
city that you call infamous. You will re-  
main, you will not depart. It is your noble  
father, it is the amiable marquise, that be-  
seches you through my voice; it is also my  
saintly mother who, before dying, confided  
me to the care of her sister's son. Do you  
recall the letter that in dying she left me  
as sole heritage? If you have forgotten it,  
take it, Maurice—here it is, read it.'

The truth is, Maurice had never read this  
letter. As it was the sole thing that was  
left her from her mother, the day after her

arrival at Valtravers the orphan had asked her uncle to return it; the good chevalier promptly acceded to this devout wish. In the midst of the preoccupations that then possessed him, it was not surprising that this young man was not interested in verifying the titles that pertained to the identity of Madeleine, or in knowing in what manner his aunt in Munich wrote French. It was naturally the least of his troubles. His father had said to him, 'Here is thy cousin,' Maurice had embraced the stranger without further question. Rather through embarrassment than curiosity, he mechanically took the paper that the young girl presented to him; and, having unfolded it with a listless hand, he commenced to run through it with an indifferent and hard eye.

Whatever one may think, and whatever he himself thought, his heart was not profoundly hardened. Under superficial callousities, there yet remained some fibres that were not struck with complete paralysis, and that were still susceptible of vibrating to the breath of powerful emotion. He had especially preserved, not, it is true, in all its freshness or in all its integrity, the most precious and the most fatal of the faculties that man has received from passion and from divine compassion, that which is born in us first and dies last, alike blessing and curse, bane and antidote, infernal anguish, celestial joy, superhuman force added to our joys and sorrows—in a word, imagination.

In reading this letter, whose characters, blurred by tears and kisses, had passed first under the eyes of his father, Maurice recalled little by little the details of the autumn evening when, for the first time, he had seen Madeleine. He saw again the shadow of the forest, the glade filled with diffuse and expiring light, the park gate, and, upon the perron, whose steps the little German slowly mounted, the chevalier and marquise rising to welcome her. He was moved by these images; a thin thread of running water pierced the dry sides of the rock; but, at the last lines, that were addressed to him alone, when he read these words: 'And you whom I know not, but whom I loved so frequently to unite with my daughter in the same sentiment of tenderness and solicitude, son of my sister, if thy mother has given thee her soul, thou wilt also be good and fraternal to my darling Madeleine,'—the rock broke, and for an instant the source, so long captive, gushed forth in impetuous and abundant waves. While Maurice stifled his sobs among the cushions of the divan on which he sat, Madeleine regarded him in silence, standing with her arms crossed upon her bosom, her air sor-

rowful and grave, like a young mother near to the cradle of her sick child.

'Maurice, my friend, my brother, what is the matter?' demanded she at last in a caressing tone.

He seated her near him, took her hand in his, and there, still quivering under the stroke of emotion, he related of his life all that he could relate without too much shocking the pure soul hanging upon his lips. He spoke of the destruction of his ideals, the disorders into which grief and ennui had precipitated him, his errors, his utter ruin, his profound disgust of life, his firm resolution to end it; he told all. One can easily conceive the nature of this recital. Maurice therein depicted himself, with secret complacency, as one of the heroes of disenchantment and a poetic victim of the realities of life,—so great is the pride of human weakness! He then ran through the world of theories that represent debauchery as the sole avenue to the energy of vigorous minds. Maurice touched upon it in a few words. He blamed Heaven and Earth—in short, for the sacrifice that he made of all society, he himself was hardly spared.

Madeleine listened with an air of sorrowful reverie and melancholy pity. When he had ceased speaking, she remained long silent, in a pensive and abstracted attitude.

'It is a strange history,' said she, abruptly, naively raising her beautiful eyes towards him, the limpid azure of which had not for a single instant been changed by the revelations that she had just heard; 'unfortunately, I must avow, my cousin, that I have not understood a great deal of it. It is too deep for the intelligence of a poor girl that comes from her province, where she has artlessly grown up among honest hearts whose experience is limited. They have not taught me these sentiments so extraordinary, and in spite of its vicissitudes I have hitherto thought that life was still a very beautiful gift of God. What I see clearly in that which you have just told me, is that you have dissipated your patrimony, and that, if I have nothing, you have just as much. This is not a reason for giving way to despair. But in your turn, what is going to become of you? What do you intend to do? Kill yourself? You cannot now do it. I have not come to apply solely to your fortune. I counted, in setting out, less upon your gold than upon your affection. Though ruined and poor like myself, you are none the less my legitimate guardian, my natural support. Be your own judge. Our mothers were sisters. Both of them are now, perhaps, watching over and listening to us. When I appeared at your threshold, your father opened his arms

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to me, and I became his dearly loved daughter. It was I that replaced you near him—it was I that was the last joy of his old age. I smoothed the bed of death, and my hands closed his eyes. However, orphan for the second time, here I am alone, without resources, without other protection than yours, in a world sown with reefs, and which I do not understand. Maurice, answer ; do you think that your life is your own ?

Crushed under the weight of duties that burst like a thunderbolt upon his head, dreading as much the obligation of living as he might have, in happier days, the necessity of dying, bound by existence as a convict that, seeing his chains fall, feels that his feet are more firmly bound than ever, Maurice answered only by a burst of despair. What could he do for his cousin, he who could do nothing for himself ? Of what assistance could he be, he who bent under the weight of his own destiny ?

'Go away ! depart ! leave me !' he cried, excitedly. 'Respect my misfortune, do not mock my distress. From the bank where you stand do not call to your assistance an unfortunate who is drowning ; look not for support to a reed beaten by the winds.'

'Friend,' responded Madeleine, 'let us lean upon each other, and we shall resist contrary winds. Let us extend to each other a helping hand, and we shall together escape from the billow which threatens to engulf us ; by a common effort, we shall come to the bank where I now am not, although it pleases you to think so. Come, Maurice, take courage. Instead of lamenting and burying yourself, rise again. Death is only a sterile expiation. Live—be a man, indeed. Reality alone is fruitful ; it is only necessary to know it to understand and love it. We are poor ; but is it for nothing that we have received from Heaven intelligence, strength and health ? We shall do, my cousin, as many others that are our peers have done, as the marquise and chevalier formerly did. We shall work like two children of the good God.'

This perspective did not appear to charm Maurice, who allowed a fierce gesture to escape him, in which was betrayed both disdain and anger.

'I shall make wooden toys, is that it ?' he demanded, shrugging his shoulders.

'Why not, my cousin ? Your father did it. He was quite as good a gentleman as you, I imagine.'

Maurice rose, walked twice the length of the room, and stopped abruptly before Madeleine.

'Well, Maurice, a good movement !' cried resolutely the pale and gentle creature.

'Well, then, my cousin, be content,' said he, in a merely polite but not very affectionate tone. 'I shall do for you what I certainly should not have done for myself : I will live.'

'Thank you, my cousin,' said Madeleine, in a tender tone. 'Ah ! you are good, and I knew well that you would not refuse me !' added she, taking his hand and pressing it to her heart. 'I shall pray to Heaven morning and evening, that it shed upon you head the dew of its benediction.'

'Enough, enough, my cousin,' answered Maurice, withdrawing his hand with somewhat bad grace and putting it into his pocket. God must have much to do, and one ought not to trouble Him for so little. I shall live ; but on condition that, when we shall have assured your destiny, I shall again become free and master of mine.'

'That is very good,' said the young girl. 'I have already projects for organization ; we shall talk fraternally about them. I am sure, in advance, that you will approve of them. Heaven and you assisting, I demand not more than two years to establish myself comfortably in life.'

'Two years ! you demand two years ?' exclaimed the young man with a movement of stupor that he did not try to dissemble.

Is that exacting too much of you ? Be assured, my friend, that I shall neglect nothing to abridge this time of probation,' said Madeleine with a sad smile.

Maurice terminated the conversation by a gesture of heroic resignation.

While this was going on, Ursule, leaving her place, precipitated herself like a waterspout into the room and threw herself upon the neck of her young master, who escaped peevishly from the effervescence of a boisterous tenderness.

Standing in the embrasure of a window, pale, immobile and hands clenched, he regarded alternately these two women ; he said to himself without circumlocution that he had both of them on his arms ; and, in spite of himself, quivering with hatred and rage, he felt kindling in his heart the appetite of a fierce beast ready to throw itself upon its prey.

However, it would be but a postponement. The care of regulating the future he confided to the morrow. Maurice conducted Madeleine as far as the door of the little hotel at which they were staying. He was obliged to submit on the way to the provincial questions and absurd amazements of Ursule, who, taking the street lights for an unequivocal sign of public rejoicing, and having lived at all times in intimacy with

the saints of the calendar, demanded naively if it was in honour of Saint Babolein that the city was illuminated. These childish questions, that, in any other circumstances, would have singularly diverted Maurice, only succeeded in exasperating him. He returned by the deserted quays, casting here and there an eager look into the black and deep water of the stream, that appeared to beckon him. Having returned to his apartments, he went directly to his case of pistols, which he opened; he remained some minutes contemplating them with an ardent and sombre eye.

"Sleep," said he at last, letting the cover fall slowly; "sleep, faithful friends, till the day of deliverance, when I shall come to awake you."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE RIGHT.

The following day, after a few hours of feverish slumber, Maurice arose, ashamed of his weakness, furious against Madeleine, exasperated against himself. In what way, after all, did the destiny of his cousin concern him? By what right, with what title had she come to claim his protection? Was it his fault that she had lost her lawsuit? What! because an aunt, that he had never known, on the point of surrendering her soul, chanced to think of sending into France a little girl that he had never cared for; because a little German, whose existence he scarcely suspected, had knocked, one autumn evening, at the door of Valtravers, here he was obliged to live and resign himself to the role of guardian, at the moment of bidding adieu to care, and taking refuge in the arms of death! Since when had it been the mission of cousins to escort their cousins through life? What more could one do for a sister? Madeleine, besides, was no longer a child. Indeed, she was twenty-two or twenty-three; at this age, orphans cease to be interesting. She abused decidedly the advantage of being without kindred. And then, frankly, what could he do for her? His resources were exhausted; he had nothing in his own right, not even the furniture of his room, which represented the price of his rent. If he had resolved to kill himself, it was not merely because it was his good pleasure; the fact is, at the point to which he had come, any other determination might have caused him considerable embarrassment. Work! the word is easily pronounced; but, when one

is rooted in corruption and idleness, it is not such an easy thing to be transplanted and acclimated in regions of order and work. Lastly, Maurice was just to himself and estimated his own character with rigid impartiality. He could no more lay claim to the continence of Scipio than to the chastity of Joseph; and, though his cousin appeared to him neither beautiful nor desirable, although this suave figure had never appealed to his degraded senses, yet he did not fully understand himself. He had sounded his heart; he knew what sediment the eight years through which he had just passed had deposited; he said to himself that at the first unforeseen shock all that vileness, to-day stagnant, would, perhaps, be agitated and rise to the surface.

He was engaged in these reflections, irritated, confused, prepared to break the engagements that he had rashly contracted the previous evening, when he saw his cousin, accompanied by Ursule, smilingly enter his room. Madeleine was plainly attired in a modest dress of grey cotton, without other ornament than a row of ivory olive-buttons starting from the neck and continuing the length of the skirt, which fell in thick folds to the floor. A shawl of white Chinese crepe, without embroidery, revealed the contour of her form and shoulders, that had yet the slender elegance and delicate grace of youth. Two severe braids of hair descended along her cheeks, the perfect whiteness of which was enhanced by a hat of light straw, trimmed with cherry-coloured taffeta. She held in her hand a parasol of blue moire, the handle of which was composed of a single piece of ivory; a small work-bag hung upon her arm. Long since accustomed to magnificently dressed women, Maurice saw in his cousin only the appearance of a grisette. It is very rare that one loses the taste for honest things without losing at the same time the instinct of the truly beautiful, for these two sentiments are intimately allied. As to Ursule, attired in her richest dress, she wore the costume of girls of her country, shoes exposed, with silver buckles, short skirt, extravagant coiffure, which she had still more exaggerated with the intention of rendering herself more agreeable to her foster-brother. Her vigorous limbs, full hips, opulent bust, white teeth and vermilion taint, reminded her of her Limousin extraction. For once, seeing her thus dressed out, Maurice was overcome with laughter.

Immediately upon entering, as if she had been in the secret of the hesitations of her cousin, Madeleine bade him be seated near her, and without allowing him time to revert to what had been settled upon the preceding

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evening, she explained to him how she ex-  
pected to arrange their life.

They were going to seek at first, in some  
retired quarter, under the same roof, two  
small rooms, one for Maurice, the other for  
her and Ursule, where they would install  
themselves plainly, as now befitted their  
humble condition. Madeleine had saved  
from the wreck of her fortune some diamonds  
that she had received from the good mar-  
quise, and that she had believed she might  
carry away without scruple. The sum that  
they would derive from their sale would  
suffice for the expense of their installation,  
and also satisfy their needs for the immediate  
future. Provided she was directed by a firm  
hand, protected by a faithful heart, Made-  
leine did not doubt her ability to build a nest  
according to her taste. She had, as the  
common saying is, more than one string to  
her bow. She embroidered as if by magic,  
and her crochet hand-work of gold and silver  
tissue was done with a taste and finish truly  
marvellous. She painted upon wood birds  
and flowers that, when varnished, possessed  
the vivid light of flowers and birds of the  
tropics. She could give music and singing  
lessons. Lastly, thanks to the care of  
Madame de Fremes, she excelled in portrait  
painting; either out of respect to the memory  
of the marquise, or because it was in reality  
the most evident and surest of her resources.  
It was here that she centred her hopes. It  
is evident that she did not lack talent; she  
possessed, in addition to all, that winged  
courage that makes light of obstacles, that  
spontaneous energy in which one is never  
aware of any effort, that charming gaiety  
which sings and laughs, together with the  
will which works. It was therefore almost  
immediately decided that Madeleine should  
attempt miniature; she rejoiced like a child  
at the thought of living in Paris as the ador-  
able marquise had formerly lived in Nurem-  
berg. It must be remembered that this had  
ever been her dream. It might even be  
affirmed that in this sense there was some-  
thing in the loss of her fortune that did not  
displease her. As to Maurice, he remained  
free to act as he chose and obey his inspira-  
tions; she only asked him to sustain and  
direct her first steps in the world and in  
the career into which she was going to ven-  
ture. At the end of two years, as they had  
agreed, he would recover his independence  
and become again master of his own des-  
tiny. But, till that time, Madeleine  
would have the right to lean upon him  
as if he were her brother; and, to escape  
the comments of malignity as well as to give  
greater weight and authority to the guar-  
dianship that he exercised, he should

pass in effect as her brother before the  
public: a pious falsehood that Heaven would  
witness without anger. All this was said  
with such verve and animation, that Maurice  
could make no objection; with such grace  
and beautiful humour, that he could not, from  
time to time, refrain from smiling. How-  
ever, when the girl had finished speaking, he  
shook his head with the air of a man but  
little touched or convinced; but rising and  
taking him by the hand without hesitation,  
she said:

'My cousin, from to-day our fraternity  
commences. Remember, besides, that your  
father called me daughter and that I was in-  
deed his dearly loved child. The day is fine;  
let us take advantage of it, and go and seek  
under some modest roof lodgings more suit-  
able to our convenience. You may choose  
the locality. For you must be anxious to  
leave this apartment, whose luxury mocks  
your poverty. Let us go then as soon as  
possible, and,' added she gaily, 'try to leave  
here that sombre and sullen air that is  
not appropriate to your age, and that ill  
becomes you, I assure you.'

'Ah! yes, ah! yes, my young master,'  
said the good Ursule in her turn, 'you must  
laugh, play, amuse yourself. You are only  
twenty-nine; you can only be Saint Nicolas.  
That is a beautiful age! Zounds, you will  
see what a beautiful household we three shall  
make, and what care I shall have ver you  
two. Come; all is not yet lost, since you  
have left health, youth and your foster-sister  
to make you, as at Valtravers, rolls and  
buckwheat pancakes that you loved so well.'

In the meantime Madeleine led Maurice  
away, who showed, while being conducted,  
the eagerness of a condemned person going  
to the block. Passing through the doorway  
he turned and perceived Ursule, who was  
preparing to follow him.

'Well now! are you going with us?' de-  
manded he, brusquely scanning her from head  
to foot.

'What! I go with you!' cried the good  
girl with naive astonishment. 'My young  
master, do you think that I have put on my  
holiday dress for nothing?'

'But, poor creature,' said Maurice with a  
dull fury that he scarcely concealed, 'you  
are not then aware, you do not then under-  
stand that you will be regarded as some rare  
animal in all the streets through which we  
may pass?'

'I understand all this, my young master,'  
replied Ursule, tossing her head. 'For my  
part, I shall not be ashamed to show to your  
Parisians of what stuff the girls of Valtravers  
are made. Seeing me they will say, 'There  
is the foster sister of Monsieur Maurice,



and, save your respect, I dare believe that it will contribute to your honour,' added she, making a courtesy.

Resigned to drain the cup even to the dregs, Maurice responded this time only with a gesture of dull despair. A few minutes later they were walking along the boulevards, Madeleine upon the arm of her cousin, Ursule following close behind, head erect and shoulders thrown back, her face beaming with joy and her arms akimbo, beating back the billows of the crowd like a ship in full sail and signals flying. It was indeed one of those splendid days when Paris opens her gilded cages and lets loose her prettiest birds—one of those joyous suns that causes to pour forth upon the glittering pavements of the great city a whole population of elegant youths and smiling women. To the lively regret of Ursule, who already obtained a complete success, and for whom every step was marked as a genuine triumph, Maurice hastened to leave those quarters which had witnessed so many times the dazzling splendour of his mistresses and his horses. The place, indeed, was no longer supportable. Without speaking of her costume, which excited the curiosity of the passers, Ursule, thinking her young master was as well known in Paris as in Neuilly-les-Bois, addressed him, from time to time, in a loud voice, with some astounding question, in order to show clearly that she belonged to his company. At other times, when the crowd became too compact, she grasped the skirt of his coat lest she should lose him and go astray. From time to time, Maurice half turned and launched a furious look upon her, to which the brave girl naively responded by a broad smile or by some characteristic gross playfulness. The poor fellow was on the rack. He had indeed thought at first to hide his shame by taking a carriage; but his cousin had observed that such grand style hardly befitted their humble station. The sky was clear, the walks were dry, and simple good sense told them that it was not necessary to take a coach to look for rooms. As to Madeleine, she advanced with feet as light as those of some bird, exhibiting neither trouble nor surprise at the noise and movement which occurred around her, apparently unconscious of the fierce mood that her companion scarcely took pains to hide, solely preoccupied with the thought of the existence that they were about to commence, and revealing the joy of a young spouse that hastens to assume her household duties.

They gained in this manner the left bank of the river. Near to the entrance to the Louvre, at the moment when they entered

upon the quay, that which Maurice most dreaded happened. Having stopped to allow an open caleche to pass, which advanced at a rapid trot, drawn by two Mecklenbourg horses, he was recognized by a merry company bound for an excursion to the woods. It was the choicest flower of the society in which he lived. With a movement of respect too profound to be sincere, four or five silly heads nodded gravely towards him; and, when the carriage had passed, throwing around him a penetrating odour of cigars and patchouly, the poor fellow, transfixed with shame and rage, heard a long peal of laughter. In that instant he experienced an almost irresistible longing to throw Ursule and Madeleine into the Seine.

Even had he been, in setting out, religiously resolved to keep his promise of the preceding evening, this promenade, like that of a convict with ball and chain, would have been sufficient to demonstrate beyond question that it was beyond his power to render the devotedness that he had promised. To live two years of such a life was to undergo a continual death of two years duration. However, Maurice felt, at the same time, that even were he the worst of men, he could not refuse to protect these two poor creatures lost in Paris, with no other guide or support but himself. Although he might not have recoiled from a crime, he had a horror of baseness. For instance, he indulged since an hour the thought of wringing the neck of Ursule; but to unworthily abandon two women who had come to place themselves under his protection, he could not summon resolution to do it.

Though pale and trembling with passion, Maurice therefore continued to walk towards the locality that Madeleine had indicated. Since she wished to retire into an honest and secluded quarter of Paris, he thought that the environs of Luxembourg would be able to realize the wishes of his cousin. Besides, in contenting himself to live near her some months, in this quarter at least, asylum of science and liberal studies, he supposed he would be almost sure never to meet any individual of his acquaintance. After having sought vainly, in the adjacent streets, lodgings that conformed alike to the poetic instincts and to the modest ambition of the young German, they took dinner plainly in the neighbourhood of the Observatory, which did not contribute to lighten the humour of Maurice, whom five-story ascensions too often repeated had disposed to a less frugal denouement. I ought to add, that even in face of suicide he had carefully preserved habits which were not at all those of an

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 point of taking his own life, would ever ven-  
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 dishes. He was exceedingly fastidious in  
 eating and drinking. Ursule literally de-  
 voured her food; Madeleine declared that  
 she had never tasted so charming a repast.  
 On their way back, in their search, as they  
 discovered no house that attracted them,  
 they entered with one accord into a street  
 whose quite rural aspect immediately cap-  
 tivated Madeleine: a secluded street, opening  
 at one end into the Boulevard des Invalides,  
 at the other into the Rue du Bac, whose  
 celebrated fountain Mme de Stael re-  
 stored. Thanks to the increase of population  
 and to the progress of industry, in five  
 hundred years there will not be in the  
 whole world a refuge for reverie; so  
 this street is to-day scarcely more than a  
 double row of houses more or less new, ugly  
 and wretchedly built. It might then have  
 been taken for some quiet hamlet, or, at the  
 very least, the green faubourg of some small  
 village hidden in the surrounding foliage.  
 During the beautiful season, one breathed,  
 penetrating into this street, the odour of  
 lilacs or the perfume of lindens in bloom.  
 Above the walls of hedges, acacias, labur-  
 nams, the trees of Judea shook their odor-  
 ous clusters. In the heart of the parks, where  
 the whistle-pipe sang during the pleasant  
 summer nights, through palings, they per-  
 ceived beautiful, silent mansions, and pretty  
 children running upon the lawns. It was, in  
 a word, Rue de Babylone, so named either  
 because of its gardens, or because it might  
 have been formerly the habitation of the bi-  
 shop of the ancient city of Semiramis. Ur-  
 sule believed herself to be at Valtravers, and  
 asked where the Vienne flowed. Madeleine  
 exclaimed that it would be happiness for her  
 to live in this village lost in the bosom of  
 Paris. As for Maurice, it was a matter of  
 complete indifference to him. The prayers of  
 the young girl were answered. She found in  
 one of the rare houses which cropped up here  
 and there from the surrounding landscap-  
 e, two small adjoining apartments, separated  
 from each other—one for Maurice, consisting  
 of two rooms; the other of three, for Ursule  
 and herself; all somewhat high under the  
 roof, but screened by immense trees. Ma-  
 deleine sensibly preferred to have before her  
 windows an ocean of verdure rather than the  
 colonnade of the Louvre.

In this way ended this day, which gave  
 Maurice a foretaste of the delights in store  
 for him. The day after and the following

days were still ruder and more laborious.  
 To select the branch in which to build the  
 nest was not all—they must bring hither  
 twigs, down and moss. With Ursule always  
 at his heels, Maurice was compelled to ac-  
 company Madeleine into stores and shops, to  
 see and examine everything, to hear prices  
 discussed and debated, he who had never  
 haggled in his life, and who made it a point  
 of honour to pay more than others. Though  
 she possessed a keen perception of the reali-  
 ties of life, though naturally endowed with as  
 much reason as grace, Madeleine exhibited a  
 considerable degree of indifference and neglect  
 in her diverse purchases: she showed that  
 infantine joy which cares little for figures  
 and scarcely stops to calculate; but Ursule,  
 who imagined that the shopkeepers wished  
 to impose upon her business capacity,—the  
 relentless Ursule raised at every step ter-  
 minable difficulties, and defended the in-  
 terests of her superiors with a greedy par-  
 moniousness that would have done honour to  
 a Jew. Somewhat violent in her language,  
 like the servants of Molière, she dis-  
 puted with the clerks, called them bluntly  
 cheats and rascals, so that indeed they  
 were more than once compelled to politely  
 request her to leave the shop. Maurice be-  
 lieved that she was out of her mind. He  
 consigned Ursule to all the fiends; but  
 Ursule still persisted, knowing well that the  
 public vehicles did not travel that way. It  
 was only by threatening to send her back to  
 Valtravers that Maurice was able to make  
 her moderate her sentiments.

Finally, at the end of the week, at the  
 most, our three companions took possession  
 of their little domain. On a beautiful  
 morning, a hackney-coach, drawn by two  
 lean horses, stopped noisily at the door of  
 the sumptuous hotel at which Maurice still  
 stayed. Ursule and Madeleine got down.

'Come, Maurice, come, my brother,' ex-  
 claimed the young girl, entering the room of  
 her cousin, with the eagerness and lightness  
 of a fawn playing upon the turf of some  
 wooded glade; 'the great day has arrived.  
 There remains for you only to bid a final  
 adieu to this furniture, to these carpets, to  
 these curtains, to this gilded ceiling. You  
 will not find their equivalents where we are  
 going; but poverty also has its luxury, and  
 happiness does not need such magnificent  
 lodging.'

'Poor lamb!' said Ursule, with an inef-  
 fable expression of tenderness, who was beside  
 herself with joy at the thought of living with  
 her young master. 'We are going to love  
 and cherish him, humour and pet him! He  
 will believe himself again at Valtravers.  
 And what pleasures, Sundays and holidays,

when we shall have worked all the week, to go out walking, we three together, in the public gardens! Hold me, Monsieur Maurice, I am too happy! See me suffocating, the impulse is stronger than I; I must, jarnieu! I must embrace you.'

At these words the excellent creature threw herself like a panther upon her foster-brother, and in spite of the superhuman efforts that he made to undo her energetic clasp, she applied two resounding smacks upon his cheeks.

It was then true! the hour had sounded, 'his hour that Maurice thought should never come. He had counted upon unforeseen hindrances, upon insurmountable obstacles, and all was done as if by enchantment. Even the evening before, he had said to himself that some accident must necessarily happen, which would draw him from the strange position in which he found himself driven, and nothing had come, nothing except reality with sure foot and wrist of steel. Recoil! it was now too late. At the moment of crossing the threshold that he was never to repass, about to separate himself from objects amidst which his turbulent youth had been wasted, Maurice was not a man to burst out with plaintive elegies, in poetic adieux. Besides, very different from places in which one has suffered and which one leaves not without agitation, the places in which life has been poorly spent can never be considered as a native country, and one always leaves them without emotion or regret. He caused Ursule to convey to the carriage all that belonged to him, then casting around him a dry and melancholy look, he took under his arm his case of pistols, he threw him out of the room, bearing away thus all his fortune and his last hope. In this instant there might have been seen beaming upon the face of Madeleine a reflection of that celestial joy which must illumine the face of angels, when they, singing, bring back to God a lost soul.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A HARD FIGHT.

These two lodgings which Madeleine and Maurice were going to occupy near each other, were humble rooms; but a poet would have been enraptured by them, at a time when poets lived yet in attic. Though everything exhibited an exceeding simplicity, at the same time everything shared the taste and native elegance that presided in the details of the furniture. The room of the young German was covered with a pearly gray paper, gathered together at the ceiling in

the form of a tent, and sown here and there with little bouquets of pinks, roses, and hyacinths. The furniture was of walnut, the chairs of plaited Malacca cane. The bed, light, small, virginal, genuine little couch of the boarding-house, was hidden chastely under an ample chintz curtain that matched the paper of the room. Near the window was seen a table covered with brushes, boxes of colours and porcelain paint-cups that had belonged to the amiable marquise. The marble mantel-piece had no other ornaments than two terra-cotta vases with bell-shaped mouths, samples of the pottery of Ziegler: while waiting November, the hearth and back of the fire-place had disappeared under a thick cushion of green moss. At the head of the bed, a little table served to sustain a lamp moving at will upon its copper support. If carpets were wanting, one could see his image in the French floor, it was so clear and shining. Along one side of the mirror hung several miniatures of Madame de Fresnes, devoutly preserved; among others, a reduced copy of the Virgin, that Madame de Mirbel or Maxime David would not have been afraid to own; on the other side were some movable shelves retained by a cord of blue silk and loaded with books, dried flowers, plants and minerals piously brought from Valtravers. The window, as I have said, opened upon a park, at the bottom of which a grave hotel appeared to be in melancholy meditation. The room of Maurice was of like character. But nothing betrayed therein habits or plans of works; to seek some object upon which to attach some hope or souvenir would have been vain. The walls were bare; the curtainless bed had a hard and cold aspect.

'To be sure, it is not beautiful,' said Madeleine in ushering Maurice into his new lodgings; 'but I think there is no room so poor that one cannot himself adorn it better than any upholsterer would be able to do it. Our thoughts and our dreams, our joys and our griefs are a luxury of furniture and decoration that many of the rich do not even suspect, and which to my mind, are worth more than velvets and silks, rosewood or mahogany. The four walls which witness our loves, work, dreams and hopes, are always the walls of a palace.'

These words but little affected Maurice, who, left alone, began to walk around his room like a newly caged lion. Finally his anger broke forth. He clenched his hands, struck his forehead, and rolled upon his bed with cries of rage. He demanded of himself by what foolish compliances, by what incredible weakness he had permitted things to come to this pass; he accused himself of in-

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beclity, and blasphemed the name of his  
cousin. During this time, Madeleine busied  
herself in putting in order her paints, brushes  
and other instruments, as much at ease al-  
ready in her new condition as if she had  
never known any other, more carried away by  
her poverty than she had been by her fortune,  
when she was left possessor of Valtravers,  
after the death of the marquise. Ursule was  
also at work; she put the things in order,  
scrubbed and polished, singing all the while  
in a full voice a chanson of her country. At  
the end of an hour Maurice went out. The  
voice of his foster-sister, which he heard  
through the partition, capped the cli-  
max of his rage. He wandered till even-  
ing through the city, knowing not where  
he went nor even caring to ask himself.  
Towards eleven o'clock chance led him  
back almost to the point from which he  
had set out. Vivid gleams of lightning  
pierced the darkness; the thunder muttered  
savagely; large drops of rain were begin-  
ning to fall. Maurice, who in reality had  
no other retreat than his attic in the Rue de  
Babylone, took refuge there. Ursule was  
waiting his return. Having hastened to the  
landing at the sound of her young master's  
step, she was struck with terror by the pallor  
of his countenance. His lips were livid;  
sunken in their orbits, his eyes burned with  
a feverish light. The good girl, seriously  
alarmed, wished to conduct him to Made-  
leine, who was accustomed to sit up very late;  
but he repelled her with impatience and  
passed by her to his room. Seated near the  
open window, he remained till morning list-  
ening to the trees of the park groaning under  
the assaults of the wind, regarding the  
heaven, less sombre and less tempestuous  
than his own soul. He went to bed with a  
fever, and was delicious when they came to  
him.

They despaired of his life for some days.  
In presence of reality, the unfortunate youth  
had not been able to endure the look of that  
rude company that he had not believed so  
near; like Don Juan when he touched the  
hand of marble, Maurice had felt thunder-  
struck. The cares of science, youth which  
was not dead in him—more than all, the  
passionate solicitude of Madeleine and  
Ursuline, recalled him gradually to life.  
They put forth every exertion to save him,  
and no mother ever showed more devoted-  
ness to her suffering child, more tenderness  
and love, than was exhibited by these two  
good creatures at the bedside of this young  
man. Sickiness is not, whatever one may  
say, such a bad guest. It has its good as-  
pects; did it serve only to make us appreci-  
ate the affection of the beings that are dear

to us, it should not be too much slandered.  
Besides, it has this excellence; it buries bad  
passions, softens hardened hearts, and bends  
across its knee, as a willow stick, the most  
intractable natures. Thus this ungovernable  
Maurice allowed himself to be nursed with-  
out remonstrance. More than once, he  
thanked with a tender eye Madeleine and  
Ursule, seated near him; his subdued hand  
sought more than once the hand of his  
cousin.

One day, perceiving above his head,  
against the wall, a portrait of his father  
painted by the marquise a year before the  
death of the chevelier, he took it and re-  
mained contemplating it for a long time, ad-  
dressing it in a voice stifled by the sobs of  
touching words of regret and repentance.  
Madeleine and Ursule wept also, but with  
tears of joy. Another day he discovered  
upon a corner of the mantel a box of  
mahogany that he had never before no-  
ticed. Convalescence, as is well known,  
is a state that in many respects re-  
sembles infancy. The same weakness  
of organs, the same naive enchantments,  
the same curiosity that the least little  
thing suffices to awaken or amuse; it is life  
recommencing—it is, in fact, another child-  
hood. Maurice caused this box to be  
brought to him; he raised the cover, and  
recognized, arranged with symmetry in their  
compartments of green velvet, the instru-  
ments which he had formerly used, with  
his father, to carve walnut, pearwood and  
oak.

'Alas!' said Madeleine, 'it is all that I  
have been able to save of your patrimony.  
I thought that you would not be displeased  
to have these objects in your possession,  
and perhaps you would be grateful to me  
for not leaving them to the mercy of  
strangers.'

'Yes, my cousin, my sister,' added  
Maurice, correcting himself immediately (it  
was the first time that he gave her this name;  
the young girl paled and appeared agitated);  
'yes, you have done well. Opening this  
box, I imagined I saw the image of my young  
years escape.'

'When it is remembered,' added Ursule,  
'that with those things there, M. le Cheva-  
lier earned his bread with the infidels! M. le  
Chevalier, a nobleman, a great lord, an  
aristocrat; what! And to say that with his  
white hands he turned wooden toys, as if he  
had done that there all his life! to say that  
he was not ashamed to work like a child of  
the people! There's one that wasn't proud;  
and yet he was a proud man.'

'Yes,' said Madeleine, 'his was a noble  
heart.'

'And Madame la Marquise,' cried Ursule, who was not inclined to stop short in her path. 'There's one who wasn't kept knocking long at the door of heaven. To think that such a great lady, who had been at court, painted portraits of a lot of beer drinkers and sourkrout eaters, when it would have been so easy to live better and richer! Jarni-dieu! She was a grand woman.'

'Yes,' said Madeleine, 'hers was a beautiful soul.'

'Like yours, brave demoiselle,' responded Ursule, bearing with respect the fingers of Madeleine to her lips.

Like people who hear a fable without heeding the moral, Maurice heard all this, and hardly thought to ask himself whether there was not therein some advice directed perchance at him. That which is especially charming in convalescence is the complete absence of all preoccupation for the future. Too weak yet to launch ourselves beyond the present hour, we take refuge wholly in the sentiment of our own conservancy. We feel that we exist—this is enough. Unfortunately, a condition so sweet cannot endure; little by little, with health, the burden of life is resumed.

Though out of danger and almost wholly recovered, Maurice was yet extremely weak, and either because his condition still demanded assiduous care, or in order to cheer and amuse him, Madeleine and Ursule passed the greater part of their time near him. In accordance with a wish that he had himself expressed, the young girl carried her work into the room of her cousin; she worked there during the day, frequently she watched during the night. She painted, embroidered or crocheted, while Ursule sewed or knit. Maurice had, at first, found this little interior-picture charming; but, the infirmities of his heart and spirit reviving in proportion as his physical recovery approached, he began to be secretly irritated by the solicitude of the two women who remained at his bedside. Already the consciousness of the burdens and duties suspended on his head mysteriously oppressed him like some noxious atmosphere; without yet seeking to account for it, he heard the dull rumbling of his destiny, like the distant noise of the in-rushing tide.

One evening, when he appeared to be sleeping profoundly, both seated around the same table, Madeleine and Ursule were conversing in subdued tones, while working by the shaded light of their lamp.

'Poor angel!' said Ursule, threading her needle, 'I do not regret the money that he has cost us. For him, I would pawn my last morning cap and petticoat. But the ex-

pense of this sickness has caused our resources to melt away, and at this hour there are not two crowns in the house.'

'Don't disturb yourself, good Ursule. I expect to finish by to-morrow, the painting of this tea-tray. I am not wholly dissatisfied with it. See the beautiful and pretty birds! We shall be very unlucky if I don't succeed in putting this work in the great store where they have already taken two of my fire-screens. This isn't all. I have two little reticules that really aren't bad; we shall go together to offer them to the shopkeepers. They assure me that these trifles bring a good price in Paris. If we happen to come to want, well! there are some rings and keepsakes left, we'll send them to rejoin my diamonds.'

'In company with my ear-rings and gold cross,' said Ursule. 'Well, it is well enough, nothing better; but, dear demoiselle, you pass the whole night working; at this poor play, you will lose your beautiful blue eyes, and your health, more precious than all.'

'Well, well!' replied Madeleine smiling, 'I am stronger than I seem. Besides, work is healthful. The marquise used to tell me that she was never better than when at Nuremberg. She worked night and day; and I can affirm that her eyes were still very beautiful a few days before her death. And then think, good Ursule, that for our dear invalid, my duty is to redouble courage and effort. His convalescence will be long perhaps; if we should not surround him with every care that his state requires, how we should reproach ourselves! what remorse would be ours! What would Maurice think, who consented to live only for us?'

'Yes,' exclaimed Ursule, turning a look of adoration towards the bed where her young master slept, 'yes, indeed he has been good and gentle enough. We have no reason to complain. He was saved solely by friendship for us, at the moment when he was about to send a pistol ball through his head. And how proud he was to walk with us through the streets. Besides, when once well, he will work. He will be so content to work for his cousin and foster-sister, for he is an angel, Mademoiselle Madeleine—an angel of the good God. I have always told you so.'

They conversed thus in a low tone up to the hour at which Ursule compelled Madeleine to retire to her room to seek a little repose. When about to withdraw, both bending over the bedside of Maurice, they remained some moments contemplating in silence that pale face, to which suffering had restored its primitive character of grandeur and dignity.

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## CHAPTER X.

## GOOD ACCOUNT.

But Maurice had not slept. He had heard everything; the next day, he was on his feet. As calm, as resolved as he had formerly been uncertain, angry and impetuous, he accepted, at last, the task bequeathed to him. However, honest souls would have been wrong in attributing this sudden awakening of his will to a movement of recognition and affection. With health, Maurice found again the hardness of his mind. The devotedness of these two noble creatures who had expended their last resources at his bedside, far from touching him, only irritated him; but God has put pride at the bottom of our hearts in order to supply the need of virtue. In the present case, pride worked the miracle that virtue should have done.

He was prepared, without enthusiasm, it is true, but without hesitation, like a man of honour who fights a duel, less by inclination than by necessity. But what could he do? To work is soon said; but he must know what to do. Turn toys and nut-crackers? This would do at Nuremberg, in the country of toy-makers. As concerns wood-carving, there were a thousand difficulties. For the indolent, the avenues of labour are always encumbered with obstacles. Besides, he had neglected this art so long that he had forgotten it. As to mental labour, he could not dream of it. It was not that he might not have been fitted for that kind of light literature that is so successful in the present; unfortunately, at that epoch, letters possessed yet some prestige, and the most difficult of arts had not yet become the easiest of trades. Some years later, Maurice might not have hesitated, and we should have at this hour another great writer. To come at the proper time is one of the greatest secrets of life. Against his will, Maurice consulted his cousin; the young girl answered with gentleness:

'Why hurry? Nothing is urgent. You are still weak and suffering. Recover your strength, the rest will come later. Provided I feel under your protection, that is sufficient—I ask nothing more. Do not disturb yourself with anything. I am strong; I have good courage. I shall work for you with joy, while waiting till you are able to work for me with happiness.'

As might be seen, such words only irritated the pride of Maurice. Here is the means that chance, or rather Providence, took, through the medium of Madeleine, to urge this young man into the only way that was open to him.

In a wing of the house, *vis-à-vis* to the attics in which Maurice and Madeleine lived, was a modest tenement composed of three rooms, occupied by a family of young artisans, cabinet-makers by trade. The husband was called Pierre Marceau. He was a good and agreeable young man of not more than twenty-five years, always in good humour, and with an air frank and open, charming in his grey blouse that a patent-leather girdle confined closely to his vigorous and supple form. He made no verses, and had no lyre but his plane and chisel. Up with the sun, he worked merrily from morning till night, as if convinced that work is alike true poetry of the people, and the best system hitherto devised for ameliorating the condition of working-men. Courteous and gentle, his wife occupied herself with her needle-work near him, keeping all the while her eyes upon her two little imps playing around their father. Marceau left his work-bench from time to time to bend over the embroidery of his companion, or to take in his arms the two little droles; then he applied himself to his work with renewed ardour. Sometimes the young wife sang in a quiet voice a chanson of Beranger, one of the most immortal chansons that have consoled the land; without interrupting his work, the young man caught the refrain in a proud and vigorous voice. When the day approached its close, the pretty household busied itself in making ready the repast, which was enlivened by the prattle of the children. They lingered long around the frugal table, and prolonged the evening amid familiar chats.

Leaving his elbows upon the window support, Maurice was frequently seen following with a careless eye all the details of this honest and industrious interior. Not that he found therein the least interest, or sought salutary instructions: it was simply a diversion. On her part, Madeleine was pleased to follow the sequence of life of this humble household; but she found in it a mysterious charm. Between her and these two young people there was established gradually neighbourly relations. The young German petted the children when she met them upon the landing. During the illness of Maurice, Pierre Marceau had come more than once to ask concerning his condition. One morning having noticed that the cabinet-maker was planing and cutting oak, as formerly Maurice in company with the chevalier had done, the young girl began to watch him with at-



tention. Bending over his work-bench, near to the open window, Marceau appeared absorbed by some difficulty that he was trying in vain to surmount. All at once, with one of those violent gestures which betray the feeling of impuissance, he threw down his tools, and struck his forehead in despair; then, with his arms crossed upon his breast, he remained standing in an attitude of profound discouragement. The young wife having approached him to try, with caresses and soft words, to raise his languid courage, for the first time, perhaps, he repelled her rudely, and tears of rage flowed down his cheeks. The young wife began to weep, while the children, influenced by the example, cried still louder. At this scene of desolation, Madeleine, moved by a good impulse, left her room, and appeared a few minutes later, in the midst of the little household, whose friendly curiosity she had more than once awakened.

'Alas! mademoiselle,' said the young woman whom she first questioned, 'this is the trouble: my husband must fill an order this very day, upon the success of which rests our whole future. Either in accepting it he has over-estimated his powers, or perhaps his talent has failed; my poor friend feels the impossibility of performing well the important work that has been entrusted to him. My husband grieves because of me and our dear little ones; I weep because I see him weeping.'

'Ah! mademoiselle,' said the young workman, 'may God pardon me for daring to think that He had put in me the stuff of which artists are made! I am but a pitiful creature, good at the most for planing planks and turning chair rounds.'

'You do not wholly understand it, monsieur,' replied Madeleine, gently; 'talent has its hours like fortune. Mediocrity alone is always ready and never hesitates. Let us see, monsieur, what is the matter.'

The thing in question was a piece of carved wood representing the figure of an archangel, destined to ornament one of the churches of Paris. The truth is the figure was badly done. Although naturally indulgent, Madeleine was obliged to acknowledge that if the future of the young family seriously depended upon the merit of the work, there was, indeed, every reason to despair. At that instant she saw Maurice at his window, who, at a sign from his cousin, repaired thither without manifesting much eagerness.

'See, my brother,' said she, 'if there be not some way of coming to the assistance of these two amiable young people, and extricating them from their embarrassment.'

Once comprehending the situation, Maurice approached the piece of sculpture and remained some minutes examining it with disdainful attention. It was, to speak exactly, only a rough-cast that promised nothing good. Ranged around him, the young cabinet-maker, his wife and Madeleine appeared to wait with anxiety what he was going to decide. Maurice said not a word; but all at once, impelled less by goodness of soul than by the intention of making a display, he threw aside his coat, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and, seizing one of the instruments, he attacked resolutely the block of oak, rebellious in the hands of Marceau. Madeleine was triumphing in secret. Standing immobile, in mute contemplation, the two artisans followed the progress of the work; whilst around the work-bench each oddly perched upon a chair, with their blonde heads and their angelic faces, the children seemed the natural accompaniment of the figure that commenced to grow under the efforts of the creative chisel.

Whatever storms have been passed through, however devastated be our heart, were it like the desert of Sahara, did it contain only arid and desolate sands, there is therein one flower that yet remains in all its freshness and splendour, as if but just expanded. Though all the others are withered around it, not a petal is wanting in its corolla; it laughs on the end of its stalk, that no wind can uproot. This immortal flower of the human heart is called vanity. Thus, dead to all that makes life tolerable, Maurice enjoyed with secret complacency the effect that he produced upon his audience. Under the stimulus of *amour propre*, he had found again, as if by magic, that skill and precision in the use of the chisel that was formerly the pride of the chevalier. Liberated from the confines of the oak, already the victorious archangel shook his trembling wings. At the end of a few hours, the figure that Maurice had taken in a rough state appeared as neat and pure as if it had been cut in marble.

'See what it is!' said he, throwing down the instruments and unrolling his sleeves; 'it was not so very difficult.'

It is impossible to describe the joy of the humble household. The two children clasped their hands, the young wife and her husband crowded around Maurice, complimenting him upon his beautiful work, blessing him for his good action. Silent and half-smiling, Madeleine contemplated this sweet rapture that she flattered herself she saw passing in the mind of her cousin; but he, his work finished, hastened to laugh scornfully within himself at the silly pleasure that he had just tasted, and as nothing

situation. Maurice of sculpture and painting it with ease, to speak exactly as he promised no more to him, the young Madeleine applied what he was doing not a word; by goodness of making a dis- tinct, rolled up his line of the instru- ments of the block of stone of Marceau. secret. Stand- ing contemplation, the progress of the work-bench each with their blonde hair, the children of the instrument of the grow under the

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seemed to him more foolish than scenes of tenderness, he cut this one short by resum- ing his coat.

'Ah! monsieur, you have saved my life,' cried the young workman, with emotion. 'I trust, monsieur,' Maurice dryly re- plied, 'that it is only your way of speak- ing, a pure exaggeration, otherwise I should therein have done you a very poor service, one scarcely worth the trouble of thanking me for.'

With these words, pushing away some- what rudely the two children that were amusing themselves clasping his knees, he went out as he had entered, and retired to his room. Whence came this fierce humour? It is because the heart of man is an abyss of shameful baseness. Unquestionably Maurice was furious, because he now had neither pretext or excuse for being idle. The young artisans were astonished at such a brusque departure, and completely confused at their inability to express their gratitude. As to Madeleine, cruelly hurt by the unfeeling words that she had just heard, she turned away to hide her tears. However, per- haps this day contained the germ of the future.

In fact, as she had hoped, from this day Madeleine noticed that Maurice held frequent interviews with Pierre Marceau. He kept silence in her presence; but in his serious and preoccupied air she saw clearly that something new was preparing in his des- tiny.

One morning, as she was about to enter the room of her young master, Ursule turned and fled precipitately, leaving the door half-opened. What had she seen? What was it so extraordinary that was passing in Maurice's apartment? She ran to Made- leine, and threw herself upon her neck, delu- ging her with tears and kisses.

'Come, come, my dear demoiselle!' and without further explanation she took Ma- deleine by the hand and led her hurriedly in the direction of the young man's rooms.

'Don't make any noise,' said she, 'and look.'

The young girl held her breath, and peered through the half-opened door, and when she had looked attentively she fell in tears into the arms of Ursule, and these two creatures held each other in a long em- brace.

In her turn, what had Madeleine seen? The most beautiful vision that she could hope to witness: standing, bending over a work- bench, Maurice in a blouse and working.

## CHAPTER XI.

## CURIOUS CONTRADICTIONS.

The moment was propitious for wood- carving. Neglected for a long time, almost lost, this branch of Art was reanimating under the capricious breath of fashion. Be it re- membered, we were then in the middle of the mediæval age. Literature was made gothic in order to be renewed. The domi- nant taste in poetry had invaded all the arts of design. Painting, statuary, architecture, extolled only the middle age. By a natural sequence articles of furniture obeyed the same impulse. They began to strip in good- ly numbers the chateaux of the provinces to satisfy the Parisian infatuation; then, when presses, dressers, sideboards, carved arm- chairs, wardrobes, were lacking, when the real middle age was in default, they created indeed almost bodily a mediæval age. Walnut, oak, pearwood, shaped by skilful hands, cleverly deceived more than one con- noisseur, and this innocent ruse enriched some fortunate artists. Through the agency of Pierre Marceau, Maurice found himself almost immediately entrusted with important work, he was able, in a few months, if not to spread around him ease and comfort, at least to put beyond need the two creatures entrusted to his care. It was poverty, but that in- dustrious poverty owes nothing to anybody, without remorse for yesterday or anxiety for to-morrow, a hundred times preferable to the fictitious and tormenting luxury in the midst of which Maurice had formerly lived. It is true that this young man did not appear much touched by, or even con- vinced of the advantages of, his new con- dition. He accepted his destiny, but detested it; he worked, but cursed the work. How many times, during these first months, he felt his courage fail and his purpose vacillate! How many times did he abandon himself to indescribable furies; even in presence of his cousin, he threw down his instruments in anger and broke under his feet the work that he had commenced, as if ignorant of the fact that grace doubles the value of sacrifice, and that the best devotion is that which is rendered with joy! At such periods Maurice was terrible. Madeleine looked upon him with sadness; then, when the unhappy child, exhausted and helpless, sank in deep dejection upon his couch, she went to him, wiped the perspiration from his brow, happy if he did not repel her with some cruel speech. Pride was the sole thing that spurred and sustained him in the struggle that he had undertaken. He ignored wholly his duty to his cousin. The thought



that she had sold her diamonds and worked to care for him,—this thought became his impulse. He said to himself that as soon as he should have assured the future of Madeleine, just so soon he would be released from his obligation towards her and be free to go where he chose. Suicide watched over his bed, not as a menacing spectre, but as an angel of deliverance.

However, there is a pleasure, unknown to those to whom life means only the trouble of being born, and which Maurice relished the more keenly in virtue of his being unconscious of his inability to resist it. I mean that pleasure, puerile if you choose to call it so, but nevertheless intoxicating, which is experienced in holding in the hand the first money earned by one's own labour. No, this pleasure is not puerile, for it is nothing else than the consciousness of our personal worth. Riches created by one's own labour, is it not the most legitimate of all riches, that of which we are the most justly proud? The heir who counts his gold is less rich in God's eyes than the workman who receives the price of his labour. These reflections were far from the mind of Maurice; but when he saw upon his work-bench some crowns that Pierre Marceau had received for him, he took them one by one and examined them again and again with an expression of infantine curiosity. He might have been taken for a miser, or a poor devil that touches money for the first time. By a naive impulse worthy of the best days of his youth, he went merrily to carry in triumph these first-fruits of his labour to Madeleine. He smiled, he became twenty years old again. Alas! he had not reached the door of the young German's room ere he named already the contentment that he had just experienced, folly, and the sentiment that impelled him towards his cousin, silliness. In less than a minute all that beautiful transport was extinguished like a stubble fire in a heavy rain-storm. Ursule was in the ante-chamber. Maurice threw coldly a handful of crowns upon the table, and withdrew without saying a word.

In the performance of a serious duty, however hard or painful it may be, God has set an interior satisfaction from which the most degraded souls with difficulty escape. Besides, just as the most ignoble profession has, from time to time, its hours of attraction, so the culture of an art, however modest it be, has also its moments of enthusiasm. Even while chafing under the bit, Maurice found a nameless charm in feeling himself useful and necessary. In this, we are all somewhat like people in important stations. Beneath

the importunities which besiege their credit and their importance, there is ever something not wholly displeasing: the ill-humour that they exhibit is most frequently only a disguise that serves to conceal their vanity. At times Maurice rose to a genuine passion for the figures created by his chisel. The chaste images of his youth hovered around his work bench. He saw near him his father, working in the shop at Valtravera; the countenance of the good chevalier appeared to smile upon and encourage him. In short, aside from the outbursts of rage, such as have been indicated, and which became less and less frequent, at the end of a few months, when evening approached, Maurice was agitated at the flight of time and the peace that he experienced. Work ever brings with it its own recompense. It isolates us from the world and from ourselves. To it alone is due that serenity which infallibly crowns every well-spent day; it should be blessed and loved.

Unfortunately, these pure influences had scarcely time to fructify in the mind of Maurice, who, his work finished, dissipated outside the moral profit that he had unconsciously drawn from it. Too superior, in his own opinion, to stoop to subject himself to an existence bourgeois and regular, he declared curtly that he expected to live as he saw fit. It must be said, he was not very curious to become acquainted with the cuisine of Ursule; to take his meals tete-a-tete with Madeleine did not please him more. Lastly, like all weak beings, Maurice held it as an honourable prerogative that he should go when and where he chose. At morning he breakfasted frugally in his room; at evening, when the bells of the neighbouring clocks struck six, he laid aside his blouse, donned his clothes, and went out, most frequently without having seen his cousin at all during the day. He thought nothing due her provided her pecuniary needs were satisfied. He went out in calmness, the brain rested, the blood refreshed by work, in silence and solitude. He experienced, at first, a species of intoxication in feeling himself out of his attic, lost in the crowd, free upon the pavement. But where was he to go? He had broken violently from his past life. Not a friend was left him; let it be said rather, in the world where he had dishonoured his youth, one has companions, never friends. He walked at random; almost always a fatal charm impelled him towards the places in which he had wrecked his moral ark.

Pale, melancholy, scanning the walls, like some shipwrecked mariner stranded upon a bank and regarding with an envious eye the

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ships sporting upon the waves that have engulfed his fortune, he traversed with a sombre air that ceaseless festivity which never considers the grief of its victims, from which the youngest, the most beautiful, and the most brilliant disappear, leaving behind them neither void nor regret, not even the luminous trail of the falling star. Stilled for an instant, the bad passions awoke and muttered ominously in his breast. Upon the boulevards inundated with light, in the midst of the enchantments which constitute the pride of Paris and one of the wonders of the world, on those sidewalks that had witnessed him so many times indulging his elegant idleness, Maurice thought of the Rue de Baylone, of his attic, of his work-bench; tears of rage rolled down his cheeks. Irritated, feverish, miserable, he returned like a wild beast wounded with a thousand arrows. Upon returning to his lodgings, before retiring to his room, he rarely failed to visit Madeleine, who, as I have already said, was accustomed to prolong her labour far into the night. It is not necessary to believe that in this Maurice yielded to an impulse of solicitude, or that he was preoccupied by a duty of simple politeness. The unhappy mortal obeyed only the base need of exhaling his anger and avenging upon these two poor creatures the misery that he experienced. It is characteristic of egotists to wish, when they suffer, that everybody suffer around them.

Maurice infallibly found Madeleine and Ursule seated working by the light of their lamp, both as serene as if they were still by the banks of the Vienne, in the *salon* of Valtravers. With hat on and coat buttoned to the chin, he entered brusquely, the face pale, eye cold, lips scornful. Both rose to receive him, Ursule with a caress, Madeleine with a smile. Never an unkind word, never an indiscreet question; nothing in their welcome that did not betoken, on the contrary, the most adorable tenderness, as if he were an amiable brother or a charming friend. Having brutally repelled his foster-sister and thrown a glance of haughty disdain upon the paintings of the young German, he went and seated himself at the end of the room; and when the two good creatures resumed their work he watched them with a furious or scornful air. The placidity of these two faces, the calm of this little interior, the order that reigned under this humble roof, the harmonious grace revealed in the smallest details of the modest surroundings; all this exasperated instead of appeasing him. Soon, without any cause, he broke forth in bitter words. Ordinarily taciturn, he possessed at such times a cruel, bitter, aggressive, im-

placable gaiety; melancholy and silent from habit, he became spiritual, ingenious, eloquent at need, when he wished to torture his cousin's heart. Having Madeleine and Ursule before his eyes, sufficed to bring out more clearly his discourses. Madeleine opposed to all that he said only a ~~soft~~ answer, an unchangeable goodness; but Ursule knew that she shed tears after her cousin had departed.

The outrages went further. Maurice belonged to that school of young rouses, Lovelaces of green-rooms, Don Juans of low degree, who, because they have foolishly devoured their patrimony with courtesans, imagine they understand women and glory in reviling them. From two or three soiled or degraded Bacchantes that they have trained *en carrozes*, these pigmy messieurs speak of half of the human kind with such irreverence, that, in listening, one is tempted to ask what trade their sisters make, and what was the character of their mothers. Though he did not find his cousin either beautiful or desirable, Maurice ended by discovering that he played in her presence the role of a fool. Her chaste and spotless beauty, instead of leaving his senses perfectly tranquil, incited self-love and vanity to mount to his head in gross fumes. Was it natural for a young man not yet thirty to live fraternally with a young woman not quite twenty-three, next door to each other, under the same roof? What would his old companions think of it? What must Madeleine herself think of it? For, in the tenderness that she exhibited towards him, Maurice could not but see encouragement. However, every time he went towards her with the intention of changing a position that appeared to him ridiculous, seized with a vague sentiment of respect which he did not understand at first, and next revolved him, he retired without even daring to take her hand.

Having left his room in the morning, one day when work was lacking, Maurice wandered till evening under one of those burning suns which cause the slime of marshes and the acum of impure passions to ferment. He dined, in the vicinity of the old Theatre Italien, in a kind of tavern of dark and dishonest aspect. Seated at the end of a gloomy room, under the flame of an oil lamp, he ate little and emptied without intermission a bottle of one of those wines mixed with alcohol that have never paid duty. It was far different from those repasts that Maurice in joyous company had formerly made in the salons of the Cafe de Paris, when his carriage waited at the door and his groom at the foot of the perron. Laying his elbows on the table, his forehead on his hands, he remain-

ed long plunged in a chaos of irritating thoughts which the fumes of intoxication still more excited. Intellect and senses inflamed, he passed the remainder of the evening in the carrefours, following with a wild eye the evolutions of the infamous sirens that the sewers of Parisian life spew forth upon the pavement. When he came back to his cousin, seeing her alone in her room, he could not restrain a motion of savage joy. Slightly indisposed since the previous day, Ursula, yielding, though with regret, to the urgent solicitations of her mistress, had retired this evening at an early hour. Madeleine was reading when Maurice entered. She closed her book, laid it upon the table, and welcomed her cousin as usual, apparently without noticing the alteration of his features, the sombre light of his eyes, the inflamed paleness of his visage. Maurice seated himself near her, and then, in a voice crisp, ardent, harsh, whose accent was better suited to insult than flattery, he began, without transition, with compliments so exaggerated, that the young girl first regarded him with a surprised air, and, at the end, burst out into a peal of laughter. This was only an additional incentive. This silvery and pearly laughter, this lively gaiety of unsuspicious nymph pursued by satyr, served to inflame Maurice and push him on. He stifled in his heart a cry of rage, and resumed immediately—he spoke of love with a frenzy of hatred, of tenderness in a tone of anger, dark language that strange words illuminated at times with sinister lights. Pale, cold, immobile, like Chastity astonished to see at her feet the offerings intended for the altars of lewd Venus, Madeleine, while he was speaking, contemplated him with an air at once proud and sorrowful; there occurred an instant when Maurice, startled by the look of his cousin, stopped short, as if he had clasped in his arms an insensible marble. Meanwhile, in the same attitude, Madeleine continued to regard him with the same sorrowful and grave look in which nothing betrayed either indignation or anger—a mixture of maternal pity and painful astonishment. Maurice did not stay; he rose and fled with fear and shame.

When, after some hours of that leaden slumber which follows intoxication, this unfortunate wretch, waking on the succeeding day, remembered what had taken place, he felt like dying from shame and confusion. Not that his conscience addressed to him the reproaches that he deserved; long since he had habituated himself to excessive indulgence; but he could not endure the thought of having to blush before Madeleine. How would he dare to appear in her presence?

He foresaw exaggerated recriminations; already, he saw himself exposed to the implacable rancours of a vexatious prudery; for, when these young rouses are obliged to acknowledge virtue in woman, they console themselves by representing it under a disgraceful aspect; they make a bugbear of it, an object of laughter. The day drew near its end; Maurice was yet a prey to these not very pleasant reflections when his cousin entered. He reddened, paled, was troubled; he would have gladly felt the floor fall beneath his feet and the ceiling fall upon his head. With extended hand, gentle look and smiling lip, she called him brother, so that he was led to believe for an instant that the scene of last evening was some cruel dream. It is rare that well-bred men do not retain a sentiment of sincere respect for the woman by whom they are baffled, and who, being able to humiliate them in their defeat cover them with the grace of her indulgence and goodness. Our heart is ever grateful for the smallest attentions paid to our vanity. Although he carefully concealed it, Maurice was keenly touched by the generosity of Madeleine; he acknowledged in his own inner consciousness that virtue is not necessarily ridiculous and harsh—that it may be for once, perchance, amiable.

Madeleine came to implore Maurice to dine with her this very day. Maurice looked at the sky, that since morning melted into rain. To go out in such weather to seek at a distance a meagre meal—this perspective possessed little attraction. On the other hand, his stomach felt the effects of the preceding evening. Somebody has somewhere said that the to-morrows of orgies create anchorites. Lastly, Maurice, who judged himself guilty in the sight of his cousin, was not sorry at being able to expiate his faults at so small expense. Noble and generous, in his turn, he granted the request of Madeleine.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A JOYOUS FESTIVITY.

The table was spread in a little dining-room, covered with pretty paper in imitation of oak. The stove was masked by tufts of asters, dahlias and rosy heaths; the only window opened upon the trees of the park, whose foliage the autumn breezes had already embrowned. The table was somewhat small; the luxury of the service would scarcely shock the prejudices of a Quaker or Carthusian friar; but upon the table-cloth of dazzling whiteness, and from which exhaled the odour of home-made linen, everything

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shone with propriety—everything had a happy, sincere and charming appearance. Sitting opposite the young German, who did the honours of her poverty with a grace that riches not always possess, Maurice was obliged to confess that this was much better than the horrible tavern in which since some time he habitually dined. The viands were neither numerous nor recherche; but what is rarer, they were wholesome and excellent. Ursule had employed all her science; the good girl had even surpassed herself. Tidy, smiling, quick, light-footed, nimble hands, sleeves rolled back to the elbow, revealing the roundness of a plump arm, it was pleasing to see her fitting about, moving and removing the plates and dishes, indicating to Maurice the finest morsels, ready to go into ecstasies whenever he found anything to his taste. Madeleine scarcely ate at all, and occupied herself about her cousin with the anxious solicitude of a young mistress, happy and proud to wait upon her lover. Object of so many cares, Maurice could not help being touched; he demanded of himself what he had done to merit them. It should be said that he was no longer insensible to the talent and skill of Ursule, which he had not hitherto suspected. Another surprise awaited him at dessert. Ursule approached him with an enormous bouquet, and began to recite a little compliment that she had learned in advance; but her voice broke with emotion, she threw herself upon her foster-brother, wished him every happiness, covering him with sweet tears and noisy kisses. Madeleine extended to Maurice over the table her hand, addressing him in a few simple and affecting words. The table-cloth was covered with *crepes* and *galettes*, as at Valtravers; a flagon of old wine, which the two good creatures had procured, in view of this great day, by dint of a whole month's privation and rigorous economy, stretched up in the midst of flowers its long neck covered with wax; the sky brightened, the birds, prior to seeking their nests, were singing in the park; the delicious fragrance of the humid foliage entered by the open window; lastly, sinking below the horizon, the sun sent a joyous beam upon the table, in the light of which the glasses glittered like so many precious crystals. Since Maurice had left the paternal roof, this was the first time that any one had made a festivity in his honour. Since ten years forgotten and lost, this anniversary violently awoke in him the best souvenirs of his youth. He recalled the time when this day was at Valtravers a day of public rejoicing. He saw again the marquise and

the chevalier surrounded by all the servants, who sincerely expressed to him their vows and their love. At these images, his heart softened. An electric thrill ran from his feet to the roots of his hair; his forehead paled and his eyes moistened. Madeleine, who was observing him, rose and came to his side to contribute to this good impulse. She leaned upon his shoulder, bending towards him her pure face, and, like that beautiful statue of the Louvre called Polymene, or rather like a guardian angel watching the resurrection of the child committed to her care, she remained some minutes in a dreamy and pensive attitude. Comparing what she had been to him with what he had been to her, Maurice felt at last his stubborn soul soften. On this occasion, taken unawares, his pride, instead of being irritated, bent the knees and humbled itself before so much virtue. Not a word disturbed this affecting scene. Ursule herself was silent. But when the young man, with a gesture too sudden not to be involuntary, seized the hand of Madeleine, which he bore quickly to his lips, Ursule could no longer restrain one of those cries of adoration that were so familiar to him, as if her foster-brother had performed the most beautiful action possible. The soiree was concluded in Madeleine's room by the light of the lamp, in the midst of gentle conversations. They talked of Valtravers, of the marquise, of the good chevalier; and also of that autumn evening when they had met for the first time, Maurice on horseback, Madeleine, a victim of the rascality of Pierrot, seated weeping upon the moss of the forest. They both wept in recalling all the details of their arrival at the chateau, the little orphan on the arm of the young chevalier, who did not suspect that it was his cousin; the horse walking behind, the bride hanging upon his neck, browsing the young shoots; the glade illuminated by the sunset light; the gaiety of the young man when Madeleine spoke of little Maurice; the park gate; the turrets of the beautiful manor appearing behind the walls; lastly, the two old companions rising upon the person to receive the young stranger. They forgot themselves in this sweet retrospect of the past. Maurice was astonished by the charm that he therein found; the railing accompaniment of the romance of Don Juan was yet heard, but at rare intervals, feeble and almost immediately extinguished by an anthem. About to retire, he was obliged to confess that life has some happy hours, and that poverty has its festivities as well as fortune. Having returned to his own room, he regarded his instruments without anger, the portrait of his father with satisfaction,

then he slept in singular peace, testifying in his own consciousness to the singular goodness of his cousin and foster-sister. His sleep was calm and profound. Waked at the early dawn by the voice of Pierre Marceau, who was saluting the day, singing and working, he leaped from his bed and set resolutely to work.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE DAWNING OF A NEW LIFE.

To believe Maurice saved, to rejoice and sing victory, to imagine that nothing remained but to extend the hand and recover youth and all its vanished treasures, would be to expose one's self to cruel mistakes, and ignore at the same time the Divine idea that seems to will that expiation precede rehabilitation, and does not permit man to remount in one day the consecrated hill, the length of which he has let himself fall. The ascent is hard to climb, and I know of some, stronger than Maurice, who have stopped half-way, pale, bruised, broken, measuring with an eye full of despair the long track that still remains for them to make. It is true that those had not near them an angel to sustain them, to wipe the perspiration from their forehead, to show them the shortest and easiest path by which wounded souls can regain the celestial summits.

The autumn approached its end. November already was well advanced, shivering in its mantle of frost, drenched with rain, feet in mud, forehead in fog. In order to comprehend all that this season brings of sombre sorrow, it is necessary to be alone in Paris, poor, homeless, obliged to go out to take one's meals, with the perspective, on returning, of solitude crouching at the corner of a miserly fire. Having overcome his prejudice against the cuisine of Ursule, forced by the rigour of winter to be reconciled with domestic life, Maurice had resigned himself to dine regularly with his cousin. Already far from the pure emotions of the evening of his festivity, it was with difficulty that he accommodated himself to these *bourgeois* habits. However, when the wind whistled outside, and the frost etched the panes, he did not find it unpleasant to be able to say to himself that his table awaited him, a couple of paces away, in a very warm and very cozy room, in which two smiling faces never failed to welcome him with eagerness. To appreciate such pleasures it is not necessary to be a Grandison.

Although not very sumptuous, the repast passed away with plenty of animation.

Maurice brought in general the formidable appetite that comes from labour, and which rendered him indulgent to the equipment of the table. Ursule understood the tastes of her young master; she took pride in making up the dishes that he liked. On her part, Madeleine made up for the want of luxury of the viands by the grace of her mind. Maurice reluctantly lent himself to such poetic illusions; but, from time to time, he marvelled upon that spirit and grace to which he had remained so long indifferent. So everything passed off pleasantly while they were at table. Unfortunately the evenings dragged away with desperate slowness, not for Ursule or Madeleine, but for Maurice, who did not know how to employ himself. Seated around the lamp, Madeleine and Ursule busied themselves with needle-work or crocheting. Maurice, with hands in his pockets, walked around the room with an annoyed air. He went from one to the other, examined their work, seated himself, rose, sat down again. Even between the brightest intelligences the subjects of conversation are not inexhaustible; I can well conceive why men have invented cards and chess to dispense with speaking when they are together. Since the day when he entered his cousin's room with the intention of dishonouring her, Maurice had become less bitter in his discourse. He himself noticed it and was more contented. More than once, upon his trembling lips, he had repressed the utterance of some unkind thought. But, though he could dominate and vanquish himself, exasperated by ennui that has also its passions and transports, he rarely passed an evening without letting escape some bitter or wounding word. Surer of her empire, Madeleine, instead of bending her head as formerly, replied with gentle firmness in that charming language which reason, tempered by grace and goodness, ever uses. Now and then Ursule slipped in a word that would have done credit to the servant of Mother. Maurice began through irritation; he came soon to maintain a sullen silence; sometimes, indeed, he could not help smiling.

Despite the angelic goodness, despite the earnest attentions of Madeleine, the evenings still seemed very long to Maurice. Frequently the conversation ceased, and was with difficulty resumed. The young girl, to combat the ennui, had asked Maurice to read to her; but, at this proposition, Maurice had rebelled. In his idle and dissipated life he had rarely chanced to open a book. In the midst of his senseless prodigality he was occupied with horses, equipages, and the like; he scarcely dreamed of seeking in read-

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ing an aliment for reverie or reflection. Repulsed the first time, Madeleine was not discouraged. One evening she put in her cousin's hand one of the most charming works of English literature, 'The Vicar of Wakefield.' It is well known with what finesse, with what touching simplicity Goldsmith has succeeded in this book in relating to us all the joys, all the troubles of the household. Maurice, in his profound ignorance, splenetically refused to read the first pages. He demanded of his cousin if she took him for a child to be amused with stories. Madeleine gently insisted, and Maurice, rather through impatience than goodness, to free himself from these importunities, commenced to read this admirable story. There is in the portraiture of all the characters, in the manner in which they are introduced, in the art with which the smallest circumstances are connected to the action of the story, so much naturalness and fascination, that it is very difficult to lay aside this book without finishing it. Maurice, in spite of his lofty disdain for that which he called nursery tales, could not resist the charm of this domestic eposée. His daily conversations with Madeleine had softened his heart and prepared it to receive and fructify these precious germs. Perceiving what trials are reserved for the most obscure destinies, he comprehended that there is room for the highest virtues, the most heroic devotedness, in the humblest conditions. He finished with a prolonged sigh, and thanked his cousin for the pleasure she had afforded him. From this day he no longer required urging. Astonished at the charm he found in these readings, headmired, without avowing it, the superior reason of Madeleine ; he allowed himself to be directed by her, and felt himself becoming better. The book closed, they exchanged their thoughts and sentiments ; Ursule took part in the discussion, and in this way they arrived at the end of the evening without having counted the hours.

Pierre Marceau and his wife came occasionally to pass the evening with Madeleine, who had formed a sincere friendship for the little household. In the depths of her heart she saw in Pierre Marceau the providential instrument of the rehabilitation of Maurice ; she could not forget that, without him, Maurice might perhaps have waited for a long time yet the chance of setting himself to work. On their side, the two artisans did not forget that it was to the intervention of Madeleine that they owed the assistance of Maurice in a thorny circumstance, when their whole future was at stake. They cherished a pious remembrance, an ardent gratitude. Although, they were accustomed

to his manner, and though they loved him, Maurice still frightened them a little ; but they had for Madeleine a genuine culte that almost approached adoration. They quickly perceived that these two young people, whom they believed to be brother and sister, were not in their true place ; so, with that amiable tact that education fails to give, they maintained in their relations as neighbours a sentiment of respect and deference that took away nothing from the sincerity of their affection.

They came sometimes at evening when the children were asleep ; occasionally, at the request of Madeleine, who loved to see them around her, they brought their little ones. Maurice objected, at first, to the intrusion of the Marceaux ; of the aristocratic blood that flowed in his veins, the poor fellow had kept only the instinct of pride and idleness. One day, in the presence of Madeleine, he spoke of them with contempt. Madeleine, who felt stronger and stronger, and who did not listen to railery on this subject, regarded him, for the first time, with severity.

'Well,' said she, 'you are only an ungrateful wretch ! say, even if this good Marceau had not opened to you the way for work into which you have entered, you should still be proud to touch the hand of a man who has closed the eyes of his old father and who cares for his wife and children.'

At this reproach, too well merited, Maurice, who, some days previously, would have stamped with rage, blushed and was silent.

One evening, all the household were assembled. Therese,—this was the name of the young artisan's wife—had brought her work ; ranged round the lamp, the three women, while working, were talking in subdued tones. Sitting some steps from them, Marceau observed them with the benevolent expression of strength in repose. From time to time, Therese, without interrupting her embroidery, smiling, raised her eyes and looked towards him ; the face of the young workman lighted up then with tranquil joy. With elbows leaning upon the table, one hand buried in his hair, Maurice turned with the other the leaves of a book that he had brought, and whose selection would have singularly astonished Madeleine, had she been able to guess the poison that it contained. He had assumed, this evening, the character of a revolted angel, triumphing in sin, which troubled his cousin. With her habitual sagacity, the young girl comprehended immediately that this book absorbed all his attention. Curious and disquieted, she requested Maurice to read. He obeyed with eagerness.



It was one of those romances so numerous since about fifteen years, but which happily are becoming rarer and rarer from day to day. It spoke with disdain, almost with contempt, of duty and of the family. To make amends, it exalted passion, attributing to it a divine mission. In this romance, as in many others published at that epoch, the hero, having trampled under foot all the absurd prejudices of which education is composed, having planted himself in face of society as an Ajax insulting the gods, or rather as a Solon destined to regenerate it by the example of his life, having maintained against institutions an implacable strife, ends by giving way and losing courage. Despairing of men and things, indignant against a corrupt society, which refused to receive the laws of his pride and the oracles of his genius, to punish it, takes refuge in suicide, as the last, the sole asylum here below for great hearts and fine souls. But unwilling to avow himself vanquished, he essayed moreover to conceal his defeat and his agony in casting towards heaven and earth a cry of rage and defiance. All these beautiful things, which have been the admiration of a whole generation, were written in a frothy, sonorous, bombastic style. Maurice found in this book the faithful image of the thoughts that had long swayed him, and that, though now slumbering, might yet be awakened by the least imprudent breath. His eye glowed with a sombre and sinister fire; he gradually assumed an accent terrible and menacing. He was so well identified with the hero whose imprecations he was reading, that he believed him to speak in his name; his evil genius again possessed him. Madeleine listened, trembling, Therese in naive astonishment, Ursule with a somewhat bantering air, Pierre Marceau with an expression of scornful good-nature. When he had finished, Maurice threw the book upon the table and regarded his audience with an air of triumph and curiosity. His glance appeared to question them.

'What trash!' said Ursule, 'what a mass of follies! Who is this wretched scamp who would like to regenerate the world, and who doesn't know how to regulate his own life?'

'Monsieur,' said Pierre Marceau, 'he is but a sad hero who never finds anything better to do than to kill himself. Men of courage have ever a part to play; each one is concerned only in choosing a suitable part. I, that am only a workman, I esteem nobler the work of my hands than all the pompous phrases of this wearisome book.'

Therese confessed, ingenuously, that she did not at all understand it.

Madeleine was silent, and applauded with

a look the words of Ursule, Marceau and Therese. Astounded by the strange success of his reading, Maurice took his hat and went out.

However, this evening was not lost to Maurice. Left alone to his thoughts, after having given vent to his anger, after having qualified, as may be imagined, the intelligence of Ursule, Therese and Maurice, after having exhausted among them all the epithets that disdain and humiliation could furnish, he was brought, will or nill, to confess that they had but taken up the cause of good sense. Later he came back to Madeleine, Marceau and his wife. Perceiving their tranquillity and happiness, he grew to love them. The children even, that at first had excited his impatience and ill humour, awoke in him an unexpected tenderness. He took them upon his knees, covered them with caresses, and in embracing them caught a glimpse of the pleasures of home.

Thus this young man reascended the muddy current that had swept him away. A few more efforts and he would touch the shore; he would shake the mud from his feet and rise towards serene regions.

This industrious and retired existence possessed its diversions and pleasures; sometimes Maurice and Madeleine went to the theatre. One evening they found themselves at the opera. They were playing *Guillaume Tell*. Maurice, in his reckless days, had never passed an evening at the opera without experiencing a profound ennui. In the midst of the frivolities of his companions in folly, it is scarcely possible that he had perceived any charm in music, in that form of the imagination so vague and yet so rich; never had the accents of a melodious voice transported him into the ideal regions of passion and reverie. Now, seated near Madeleine, alone with her—for no one in the crowd that surrounded them sent him a friendly look—he listened to the last song of Rossini as to a new language whose meaning was revealed to him for the first time. The opening measures had moved him deliciously; with astonishment he felt himself penetrated with enthusiasm and sympathy for this beautiful poem. The sobs of Arnold, at the moment when he learns the death of his father, summoned up in him the remembrance of his own parent, who had died without his having for the last time pressed his failing hand. The oaths of the canons sworn for the common deliverance, awoke in his heart a fibre hitherto mute—love of country and liberty. All pure thoughts join hands; when one of them has re-entered into our conscience, it beckons its companions by a mysterious sign, and opens

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to them the door of its new domain. Maurice could not help making a sorrowful and severe self-examination. What honour had he been to his country or his family, he asked himself. He exchanged a few words with his cousin ; but, by the tone of his voice, and by his absent look, Madeleine clearly comprehended that his thought was not upon his lips : she feared to trouble him and said no more.

They returned together under a starlit sky, talking of their emotions. Listening to Madeleine, Maurice discovered new sources of admiration that had escaped him. Upon returning to their rooms, awayed by the profound impression of the representation, he did not at once leave his cousin to repair to his own apartment ; he opened the window and remained some instants contemplating the heaven whose serenity had descended into his heart. Then he came and seated himself near the young German, who, to worthily crown this poetic evening, asked him to read Schiller's *William Tell*. He obeyed with joy. Scarcely had he read a few pages, when his voice, transformed as if by enchantment, assumed an accent of unction that Margaret listened to with rapture. As he proceeded in the recital of that wonderful deliverance of a whole people, he seemed transfigured. His forehead was illuminated with a gentle light, his glance seemed animated with celestial hope. The former man was effaced, and Madeleine contemplated with pride the new man that was before her.

In awakening to the extent of his duties, Maurice did not delude himself with respect to the value of his faculties, for Madeleine possessed the art of alternately exciting and subduing. He did not therefore exaggerate the importance of the role that he had to play. Enough people, thank God ! believe themselves called to direct the chair of state ; Maurice ~~and~~ no wish to increase the number. He prudently remained in his place, feeling that though it is not given to all to conduct public affairs, it is still the duty of all to be interested in them. From this day, he followed with great solicitude the march of current events, and his heart was no longer closed to those sentiments of honour and glory that he had formerly ridiculed.

Thanks to his work, Maurice enjoyed already a sort of competence. Madeleine, in more fortunate times, had studied music and could sing with taste. Maurice had not forgotten it, and, as if to thank his cousin for the cares she had lavished upon him, especially to testify to the angelic patience with which she had borne his anger and

harshness, he presented her with a piano. This was a great happiness to Madeleine. This unexpected present gave new life to their little reunions. Frequently Madeleine gathered around her Pierre Marceau, his wife and children, who listened to the music with rapture. Maurice also was pleased to listen.

One evening, when he was alone with her, Madeleine ran through the leaves of a music-book upon the piano ; it was a collection of the melodies of Schubert : she chose one of the most beautiful and touching—*The Adieu*. What I admire especially in these compositions is, they do not support mediocrity. Rendered faithfully, they carry us away in ecstasy or lull us into delicious reverie ; sung unintelligently, with a purely literal exactitude, they plunge us into fathomless ennui. They are touchstones that rarely deceive : in order to move and charm, in singing the melodies of Schubert, to know music does not suffice ; the soul of the poet is necessary. Madeleine felt profoundly this divine genius ; she could render with simplicity all that she felt. Her voice had not a large compass, but it was of a penetrating timbre ; no one could listen to it without emotion. She rendered *The Adieu* with a melancholy so touching, that Maurice was affected.

He raised his eyes to hers, and for the first time in his life he realized that she was beautiful ; not, as I have previously said, that she offered to statuary a complete type of perfection, but her charming soul beamed in her eyes, her melodious lips possessed a grace that no words can translate. Hitherto Maurice had not separated beauty from voluptuousness ; he confounded admiration with desire ; did he even know what it is to admire ? A new sense awoke in him. He contemplated Madeleine in almost religious ecstasy, as a pilgrim kneeling before a Madonna.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### LABOUR AND SWEET CONTENTMENT.

Thus the dream of the marquise a few hours before her death was realized : from the bottom of the abyss into which he had fallen, Maurice gradually remounted to the light of day, thanks to the helping hand of Madeleine. Already he felt his hair moved by the gentle breath of serener regions ; he breathed the fragrance of the neighbouring summits ; he heard confusedly the voices of his youth, which sang in chorus in praise of his return. Already might be seen upon his face the glorious sign of his

rehabilitation. His features, long since turned and prematurely hardened, wore the stamp of dignity that industry infallibly impresses upon the forehead of men of courage and will. Dimmed by debauchery, his eyes resumed again their limpid light; his lips, sometimes contracted by anger and ever ready to shoot forth a poisoned arrow, now relaxed as a bow in repose, and expressed only benevolence. Lastly, when he walked with his cousin, Maurice found again the elastic step of his youth. A second spring-time of life appeared in him, enriched perhaps with fewer graces than the first, but fruitful in surer promises, and already rich with the promised treasures of summer. Alas! the poor fellow had not attained it without effort. How many times, with lacerated feet and forehead bathed in sweat, he had stopped discouraged upon the way! How many times when the end was almost reached, he felt himself slip the whole length of the incline that he had climbed with so much difficulty! Quite often, in an hour of rebellion or dejection, he lost the fruit of many months of toil and struggles. Very frequently, at the moment when the good seed commenced to germinate in his heart, a terrible storm, impossible to predict, had destroyed the hope of harvest; but Madeleine watched over him. With angelic patience and indefatigable solicitude, she sustained, upheld, encouraged him; she planted anew the heart that the tempest had devastated. Then kneeling in her own room she prayed fervently; for, as pious as beautiful, she thought that the creature could do nothing without the assistance of the Creator, and that the noblest undertakings would never fail if Heaven smiled upon them.

He who reads the heart had already blessed her undertaking. Maurice, long known as disgusted with everything, scornful, bitter, pitiless—this Maurice no longer existed: Madeleine had made a new man of him. If at intervals the old spirit reappeared it was only a pale phantom that the young girl immediately exorcised with a gesture or a look; if the tempest of his past life re-awakened and muttered at long intervals, it was but the dull sound of the distant thunder when the sky has recovered its serenity. Maurice's sadness or ill-humour no longer persisted against the gentle speech of his cousin; Ursule herself, who had so long annoyed him, amused him, and at times communicated to him her high spirits. Did he attempt to assume his grand disenchanted airs, the noble girl, with her common sense, brought him back to reason by some characteristic sally; instead of losing temper, he

laughed with her. He began to enjoy the taste of the realities of life that he had at first repelled in disgust. The flavour is acrid, and yet one learns to like it. He realized that in the fulfilment of a duty, however humble, however modest it be, there is more genuine grandeur than in that lucky philosophy which consists in denying or deprecating all that relates to human nature. He realized also that life is pleasant as it is useful, that with rare exceptions it is only egotists and the helpless that take refuge in suicide. Child of an irreligious century, in spite of incredulity he felt, under the influence of his good angel, hope and charity awakened in him. He did not believe but he hoped, and he wished to believe. While waiting, he freely confessed that no one risked anything in conforming on earth to the verities that religion inculcates. Suicide no longer watched at his bedside; people that are busy from morning to evening sleep nights, and scarcely think of shuffling off the mortal coil. Those precious pistols that had formerly inspired so many fine phrases, had been sold to buy flowers for his cousin on his birthday *fete*. Along with his heart, his mind was elevated. He loved Art, he read the poets. Like his father at Nuremberg, he learned to acknowledge the royalty of intelligence. Attentive witness of the movement that was then making in the world of ideas, he welcomed with indulgence, sometimes with enthusiasm, all the generous utopias that, not long since, had excited only his anger or disdain. If he maintained an implacable hatred towards that low, envious, hypocritical democracy, friend of the people, because it is the enemy of all superiority; if he profoundly detested the charlatans who make a trade of socialism and philanthropy, he venerated the disinterested souls who embrace with sincere devotedness the cause of labour and poverty.

It must not be believed, however, that Maurice had not his relapses. He still had his days of despair and languor. At times the burden of his faults fell with all its weight upon him; at times the spectre of his wasted youth abruptly appeared to him and struck him dumb with dread. It is the punishment of beings who have lived ill, to bear for a long time along with them, even in the midst of a better life, the soiled shadow of their past. Thunder-struck, with haggard eyes, the unhappy mortal saw slowly defile before him the sombre cortege of his souvenirs; his neglected father, the domain of his ancestors sold at auction, the destiny of Madeleine left to the chances of fortune; then came in its turn the image of

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the years wasted in debauchery. Crushed under the weight of his own self-contempt, too proud to seek in the tears of repentance for release from his conscience, Maurice took refuge in a fierce silence; without uttering a cry, like the child of Lacedaemon, he allowed his woe to corrode within his bosom. But Madeleine was ever by, anxious, vigilant, never losing sight of him, fathoming all the motions of his spirit. Better than Maurice, she knew what was passing within him. In these days of dejection and taciturn melancholy, she redoubled with ingenious tenderness her pious and touching cares. She possessed adorable secrets for softening and relaxing that heart hardened within itself, to pierce the source of the stream, to open mysterious issues to the waters which pressed upon it. While seated near her cousin like some young mother, she talked to him in a grave and gentle voice; while she spoke, Maurice felt his wounds heal. At evening she seated herself at the piano: like Orestes at the accents of his sister Electra, Maurice, in listening, felt his remorse appeased. He underwent gradually softening influences. Insensibly emotion prevailed. Under the ever increasing charm his heart was ready to melt; profuse tears escaped from his eyes. Tears are divine; they are a celestial dew that wash away our stains. Maurice was at last purified at this fountain.

Aside from days of this character that became rarer and rarer, time flowed away in enchanted hours. The two years that Maurice had pledged with such bad grace to his cousin, had expired several months since; he scarcely dreamed of reclaiming his liberty. Having become attached to his work, he fell in love with his art. Work was never lacking; through the introduction of Pierre Marceau, who had for him a friendship, a well-proved devotion, orders came unsolicited. Maurice had attained in wood carving almost as great success as his father in toys and nut-crackers. On her side, Madeleine was no longer reduced to paint fire-screens and tea-trays; her miniatures were sought after, especially in the salons of the aristocracy, in which the report had spread that a young nobleman and his sister, ruined by a lawsuit, were eking out a poor existence by their work in the attics of one of the houses of the Rue de Babylone. This was more than was necessary to occupy a languid society that eagerly watches for occasions to divert itself. After having suffered from poverty, Madeleine and Maurice enjoyed at last the competency that never fails to crown the efforts of a determined will, when it has for auxiliaries the sentiment of order,

simplicity of tastes, modesty of ambitions. They could have quitted their attics and installed themselves more elegantly, seeking a less elevated nest. Maurice had pondered upon it. Not that he desired on his own account an abode more sumptuous; he felt a love for his little room, he fully realized the truth of the words, that the walls which witness our work, dreams, hopes, are always the walls of a palace. The little room that had been the theatre of his regeneration by work and resignation, became for him a sanctuary that he could not abandon without grief; but this young man, formerly so brusque and harsh, vexed himself concerning the welfare of Madeleine with the solicitude of a brother. Not to be able to restore the fortune she had lost was the misery of his life. He had therefore repeatedly offered her larger and more commodious lodgings in a retired quarter. Madeleine replied:

'Why change our existence, since we are so happy here? Happiness has its habits; in interfering with them care is necessary. We are somewhat near the sky, but we breathe a serene air; we live in a deserted quarter, but we have a park under our windows; instead of the noise of carriages, the singing of birds awake us each morning. Our rooms are small, but in winter are warm. Take my advice, my friend, let us remain in our attics; we should be ungrateful in leaving them.'

If Maurice still insisted to quiet his conscience, he nevertheless applauded in secret the counsel of his companion. They continued to live as in the past; except Maurice took delight in embellishing the humble little parlour of his cousin, while Madeleine had no greater joy than to enrich the room of Maurice with all the objects of art that he loved. These young friends worked for each other; in this way work becomes pleasure.

They lived in solitude, without other acquaintances than the good Marceaus. Charmed with the grace and elegance of her nature, some fine ladies, whose portraits she had painted, were indeed attracted towards Madeleine; the young girl had been able to resist these overtures, which originated, in truth, only in a sentiment of curiosity. She maintained a complete reserve; such was the serenity of her spirit, that Ursule and Maurice never heard her express either a complaint or even a regret at the remembrance of the beautiful domain that an adverse lawsuit had snatched from her. She rarely spoke of that unfortunate affair; she might have spoken of it with gaiety, if it had not had reference to the patrimony of Maurice. On this head, Maurice was less resigned. He could not think without remorse and bitter-

ness of that chateau in which he was born, in which his father had died, that had been lost through his fault. Frequently his heart turned towards Valtravers with sorrow. To wish it otherwise were exacting too much of human resignation; it would also be exaggerating too much the luxury of the attics, the enchantment of wood-carving. As to Ursule, she regretted nothing, desired nothing. She sang praises of Maurice, and repeated with more energy than ever that he was an angel, an angel of heaven, an angel of the good God. 'Come! come!' said Maurice at times good-naturedly, 'you know there is only one angel here—it is neither I nor you, gross creature.' At these last words, that to her had been at all times the highest expression of the friendship of Maurice for his foster-sister, Ursule burst into tears and sobs; she cried that Maurice was an archangel. During the pleasant season, when they had worked all the week, on Sunday all three wound their way towards the fields, after Ursule and Madeleine had listened to low mass at the church of the *Missions-étrangères*. It was to them the most beautiful of holidays. They passed the day upon the hill sides, at the bottom of the valleys, dining a l'aventure, and returned overflowing with happiness. In this way Maurice revisited, with his beautiful cousin, those woods of Luciennes and Celle, in which, two years before, he had shaped his plans of suicide. Under the chestnut groves that he had filled with his soul's sorrow, by the border of the little lake, fringed with alders and tremulous poplars where death had appeared to him, he listened to the music of life in his breast.

## CHAPTER XV.

### SAINT ELIZABETH.

Meanwhile it happened that this young man was seized with a strange malady. Since some time he experienced in the presence of Madeleine an inexplicable trouble. One might have seen him alternately turn pale and redden under her glance, and tremble at the sound of her voice. At evening, while she embroidered, he remained whole hours contemplating her in silence; it was no longer the furious or scornful air that he formerly possessed. When he entered her room his blood flowed violently to his heart. If Madeleine entered his, he welcomed her with the embarrassment and awkwardness of a child. At times he wept without divining the cause of his tears. In his sleep he listened to the almost imperceptible noise of an enchanted work that

was making in him. What was passing within him? Maurice had later a vague revelation.

Through the agency of Marceau, Maurice had received the order for a great figure. It was in honour of a Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, that a rich baronet, faithful to the traditions of his family, which had remained Catholic, designed to decorate the Oratory of one of his chateaux in Lancashire. The young artist had accepted this work with all the more eagerness, because his mother had borne the name of this saint, and he combined both of them in the same sentiment of veneration. However, despite the very real knowledge that he owed to the instruction of his father, despite the dexterity with which he handled the chisel, at the moment of attacking the oak he felt himself seized with a profound self-distrust. He, who hitherto had played with all difficulties with a confidence that might pass for presumption, he hesitated; he dared not strike his chisel into the wood; he was astonished at his own timidity, for he did not yet know that distrust of self is a sign of true talent. He interrogated the recollection of all the sculptured figures that he had seen in churches; none of them realized the ideal of a queen and saint, none had the nobility and chastity that belonged to this character. Time slipped away. He outlined at first the draperies and the hands. The ambition to produce at last a work capable of establishing his renown and meriting the approbation of his cousin sustained his courage, and at the same time rendered him more severe towards himself. He was never content with the fold that he had just finished; he found that the material had never enough flexibility, that the movement of the body had never enough grace. The hands occupied him long; he endeavoured to give them a regal elegance. It is thus that *chefs-d'œuvre* are created; the multitude that admire them never suspect the labour they have cost. When the hour arrived to commence the head, his hesitation redoubled. However, he set himself at work, and soon the chisel obeyed the impulse of a mysterious thought. The forehead was rounded without effort, the eyes were modelled as if by enchantment; softly shielded under the shadow of their orbits, they expressed the rapture of a soul in prayer. The lips, full of indulgence and goodness, were half-opened as if to afford passage to the balmy breath: the hair, divided upon the forehead into two masses, descended upon the cheeks and then raised over the ears, formed a frame for the graceful oval of the face. After some moments of silent contemplation, Maurice retouched

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slowly, with secret complacency, all the parts that appeared modelled with incomplete precision. He thinned off the sides of the nose, which did not seem fine enough; he softened the curve of the eyebrows, which did not appear majestic enough. Finally he threw down his instruments and withdrew a few paces in order to better judge of his work.

While this was going on, Madeleine entered and scarcely could believe her senses. She clapped her hands and exhibited a naive joy, while Maurice, confused, embarrassed, knew not what countenance to keep, and blushed like a young girl whose first secret is discovered. In seeking the model that was to guide him, he had found in his heart the image of Madeleine; without willing it, or even dreaming it, he had faithfully rendered the charming features of his cousin. A light broke in upon him, but it was almost immediately extinguished again. What could he comprehend of those chaste preludes of love, he who had hitherto known only the gross intoxication and excesses of passion? However, from this day the malady that he experienced only increased, and the serenity of his soul remained troubled more profoundly than he would have dared to tell, or even to avow to himself.

This figure of Saint Elizabeth was destined to bring into his existence a storm in other respects terrifying, and he scarcely suspected that it would decide his whole destiny.

This figure was still in his workshop; it might be said that Maurice was loth to give it up. Each time that some one had come from the rich baronet, he found some pretext to postpone the delivery. To listen to him, there was ever left some part imperfect, which demanded the aid of his chisel. The truth is, the artist had finished retouching his work, and, like Pygmalion, was feasting his eyes in contemplating it. One morning, the baronet presented himself in person. Tall, slender, with blue eyes, white skin and light hair and beard, he was still a young man, appearing younger than Maurice, though in reality he was several years older. Simple and in good taste, his costume from head to foot was of an irreproachable elegance. He entered coldly, saluted Maurice with a *distrain* air; then, without further concerning himself with the master of the house, he went directly to the Saint Elizabeth. He remained some time examining it in silence, standing motionless, the body slightly inclined, his glass in one hand, his cane and hat in the other.

'I have not been deceived,' said he at last, without turning his head, and speaking as if to himself; 'it is the ideal that I have

dreamed—it is indeed the work of a great artist.'

Having said this, the gentleman opened a little *portefeuille* that he drew from the pocket of his coat, and took therefrom a small package of bank-notes, which he laid lightly upon the work-bench.

'No, monsieur, no!' exclaimed Maurice. 'If you please, we shall hold to the price agreed upon. Take back your bank-notes. Also, indeed, monsieur, your generosity is purely thrown away; for, if you wished to pay the price at which I value the work, your whole fortune would not suffice.'

At these words Sir Edward (this was the baronet's name) deigned, for the first time, to throw his glance upon the young artist. Though Maurice wore a blouse, by the whiteness of his hands, by the purity of his features, by the proud attitude of this young man, upon whose forehead work had re-established the effaced imprint of his race, the baronet quickly comprehended that he was not an ordinary workman. He comprehended it more readily because he was distinguished as much by the elevation of his faculties as by his wealth. Somewhat confused, somewhat troubled, he did not like to withdraw before making amends for his too Britannic entrance. Seating himself familiarly upon the edge of the little couch that served both as bed and divan, he entered into conversation with Maurice, with a grace very rare among the sons of Albion. He talked to him of his art with the taste of a man who loved it and knew how to appreciate it. Reserved, cold, and silent, at first, the young artist was gradually won by the exquisite simplicity of his language and manner. In this little room, near to the work-bench, in the midst of blocks of oak and chips of wood that strewed the floor, they talked as in a *salon*. By an involuntary calculation of vanity, the one was impelled to prove that he had not always lived by the labour of his hands, and that he was no stranger to any of the elegancies of opulent life; the other strove to show that, notwithstanding his wealth, he clearly comprehended the worth of labour and intelligence. They thus touched upon grave subjects of conversation. In listening to Maurice, Sir Edward could not help feeling that he was in the presence of one of his peers. In listening to Sir Edward, Maurice recognized that poverty has no monopoly of wisdom, and that all conditions of life, from the most elevated to the humblest, are fruitful in teachings to minds that know how to profit by them. Coming back to the figure of the saintly Duchess of Thuringia, the baronet related how his mother had borne the gentle name of Eliza-



both during the few days that she had passed on earth. Maurice, in his turn, said that his mother, dying young, was also called by the same name, and this coincidence, how little soever was its importance, established between them a sort of sympathy. In short, at the end of two hours they separated pleased with each other, and already almost friends.

This commencement of intimacy was not destined to remain long at this point. Rich without arrogance, grave without stiffness, expansive, affectionate, witty at need, Sir Edward was one of those Englishmen that one meets with at times when born under a lucky star. He passed generally for an original character: he was so indeed. An elevated spirit, a liberal mind, a generous and chivalrous heart, a nature prompt in devotedness, he had, especially, in the highest degree, the sentiment which incites refined minds to conceal the advantages that chance of birth has lavished upon them, and which might be called the modesty of wealth. More fortunate, stronger than Maurice, he had passed through the storms of youth without leaving therein any of his native purity. The wreck of his ideals had not turned him from his way. He did not, like Maurice, think himself warranted, in virtue of some vulgar deceptions, in vilifying humanity. In learning to know men, he had felt himself called upon neither to hate or despise them. With the experience of a sage, he had the enthusiasm of a poet, the candour and ingenuousness of a child. He united, by rare good fortune, two faculties which, unfortunately, often appear to exclude each other: he knew like those who are no longer capable of loving, and he loved like those who are as yet unacquainted with the ways of the world. He had, moreover, expanded and enriched his intelligence by study and travels. Endowed with vivid intuition of the beautiful in art, he honoured talent, he professed the culte of genius. For several years he had passed the winter at Paris in the friendship of a few chosen artists. Society attracted him but little; he was found less often in salons than in studios.

He frequently called on Maurice. He came in the afternoon, bringing with him some choice imported cigars, seated himself on the edge of the bed and smoked, while Maurice, standing beside his work-bench talking at the same time, was busily occupied in shaping and polishing oak and walnut. Sometimes Sir Edward rose to inspect the work; at other times, Maurice interrupted his work, lighted a cigar, and came and seated himself near the baronet. These two young people formed a strong affection

for each other. Maurice had arrived, by insensible degrees, at semi-confidence. Though he prudently kept silence upon the disorders of his past life, he spoke effusively of his sister, who worked under the same roof. Of a tender nature and poetic organization, Sir Edward was pleased at the recitals of this fraternal existence; but, although he desired to become acquainted with this young sister, through discretion he had not yet dared to request Maurice to introduce him, and, strangely enough, despite the sincere attachment that he had for him, Maurice maintained upon this subject the strictest silence, as if he had a presentiment that therein his whole happiness was at stake. Alas! from destiny there is no escape. One day while the baronet was with Maurice, Madeleine entered. Maurice had spoken to her more than once concerning his new friend, and the young girl, who rejoiced to see all the beautiful sentiments blooming again in a heart so long devastated, had constantly encouraged the progress of this growing friendship. In Sir Edward's presence, Madeleine showed what she was naturally; though, with the intention of rendering herself agreeable to her cousin, comprehending, besides, with a single look, that this young man was worthy of her confidence, she took, as is commonly said, more pains than a first interview might perhaps merit. She withdrew at the end of an hour, leaving Sir Edward in raptures.

'You were right, monsieur,' cried he with enthusiasm, when she had left the room. 'You were right in praising the charms of your sister; but, I find, now, that you spoke too coldly of so many graces and chaste seductions. Never did a purer soul shine through a gentler face. I understand how it is easy for you to create *chefs-d'œuvre*; the beauty of the model explains the genius of the artist. My friend, fortune has treated you less severely than I feared, since it has left you so precious a treasure.'

He could have spoken long in this strain without running the risk of being interrupted. Bending over his work-bench, Maurice was turning a piece of wood and did not even appear to listen to what Sir Edward was saying to him. The same day, during the dinner and the rest of the evening, the baronet was the subject of conversation in the room of Madeleine. By the elegant simplicity of his manners, by the refinement of his language, by the natural elevation of his ideas, Sir Edward had won the girl's sympathies, who could not help congratulating her cousin upon possessing a friendship of this character. Women who love have a wonderful instinct for measuring at

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a single glance the value and sincerity of the friendships that surround the object of their regards. This was not all. Uraule, who had met the gentleman upon the stairs, expatiated endlessly upon his good looks, and refused to believe that he was an Englishman. Lastly, Pierre Marceau, who spent the evening with Maurice and Madeleine, and who had long known Sir Edward, having made in his hotel several pieces of cabinet-work, related some of his generous traits, which appeared to strike vividly the imagination of the young German, while Uraule urged him on with cries of admiration and emotion. In the midst of this concert of praises, Maurice did not remain mute. But he was suffering, without seeking to account for the *malaise* that he experienced. He suffered without understanding why, like plants at the approach of a storm, though the heaven be clear, and no cloud yet appears to dim its purity.

From this day, Sir Edward called upon Madeleine. Short and rare at first, his visits gradually became longer and more frequent. He came during the day, frequently he returned at evening. Madeleine received him with warm-hearted kindness, and did not seek to conceal the charm that she found in his company. Maurice observed it with disquietude ; at times he surprised himself watching them with a jealous eye. There were hours when the unhappy man felt against his friend a bitter resentment that he could not explain. Soon he fancied that his cousin was more reserved with him, more open-hearted with the foreigner. He noticed already that the baronet no longer spoke of the voyage that he was accustomed to make every year at this period. One evening, he ventured to question him concerning his approaching departure ; the baronet answered that he was not going, and Maurice thought he saw Madeleine thank him with a smile. This vague malady, this mysterious pain, ended by assuming at length a serious and alarming character. Maurice sought solitude, and had no longer any inclination for work : an unknown ill weighed upon and consumed him. That which was especially strange in all this was, that Madeleine, who was formerly so vigilant and clear sighted, seemed to be unaware of the changes that were taking place in her cousin. It might be inferred that Madeleine had eyes only for Sir Edward.

One morning, as he was seated upon the edge of his bed, sad, dejected, feverish, and questioning himself with dread, Maurice saw the gentleman enter, graver than habitual. Sir Edward came and sat by his side, and, without opening his lips, began to trace invisible

curves with the end of his cane upon the floor of the room, with the air of a man who has something of importance to say and does not know how to commence, while Maurice examined him anxiously, as if he divined that the storm, whose influence he had borne for more than a month, was about to break upon his head.

'Maurice,' said he, finally, with that amiable embarrassment so becoming to wealth when it addresses poverty, 'I loved your sister before I knew her. In speaking of her, you taught me to love her ; I was pleased to mingle both of you in the same sentiment of affection and respect. I came to know her, and this sentiment has become love. Could it be otherwise ? I constitute you a judge in this matter ; if this amiable person were not your sister, could you have seen her and not adored her ? Noble children, I know nothing of your family or of your destiny ; but I have seen your life, and that is sufficient. By the way in which you have borne misfortune, you have shown that you are worthy of wealth ; on my side, I think I have proved myself not unworthy of poverty. Maurice, we are friends ; do you wish that we become brother ?'

Paler than death, Maurice let fall an icy hand into that of the baronet.

'Sir Edward,' replied he in a tremulous voice that he vainly tried to calm, 'the words that I have just heard equally honour all three of us ; believe me, I am profoundly touched, as I ought to be ; but Madeleine, but my sister—undoubtedly, she loves you. You have her assent ? You have, at least, divined the secret of her soul ?'

'No, my friend, no ; I do not know if I am loved,' Sir Edward modestly responded, 'but I firmly believe in the force of attraction of true love, and I am persuaded that perhaps, by persevering tenderness, by never-ending devotedness, my heart will succeed in winning the heart that it has chosen.'

'But Madeleine, Sir Edward, Madeleine knows that you love her ?'

'I do not think that she looks upon me with disfavour ; but neither my lips nor my eyes have ever spoken to her of love. Before asking her consent, I thought it was my duty and my honour to come and solicit yours.'

'It is well,' said Maurice, extending in turn his hand to Sir Edward. 'To know your worth, I have not waited till the present moment ; my esteem and friendship you have long since acquired. I shall consult Madeleine, and if your wishes are agreeable to her, I can promise you in advance that nothing will oppose your happiness.'

The baronet withdrew, his heart overflow-

ing with sweet hopes. If he loved Madeleine, if he had not been able to see so much candour and reason, so much grace and beauty, without being fascinated by it, he also loved Maurice with intense affection, and that which especially delighted this poetic mind, this tender and generous soul, was the thought of avenging these two young people for the injustice of fate, in restoring them, in the face of the world, to the position that they had lost.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HIS SACRIFICE.

Left alone, Maurice was sunk in a chaos of thoughts so confused, and of sentiments so conflicting, that the cleverest analyst, the most subtle psychologist, would have been perplexed in seeking to explain them. Having conducted, by a supreme effort of will, Sir Edward to the head of the stairs, he re-entered his room and threw himself upon his bed, as if crushed by the words to which he had just listened. He felt at first a horrible agony, impossible to describe. This torment was succeeded by an utter prostration. The tumult of his senses was appeased; little by little his perceptions became more precise and lucid. Soon his face shone with a gentle radiance, like the first light of the dawn. Indeed, it was the dawn of a new life. A celestial ray beamed in his look, a child-like smile enlivened his half-opened lips, still pale and trembling. He continued long in mute ecstacy. Then his breast heaved and swelled; suddenly tears sprang from his eyes, a cry went forth from his breast, and, like resuscitated Lazarus, he raised his arms towards Heaven. In looking to the bottom of his heart, Maurice had just perceived a newly-opened flower; he breathed its perfume,—this flower was love. He loved! Ah! to understand this intoxication, one must himself experience it; at the decline of a precocious autumn, he must feel germinate in his soul a second spring-time—he must feel revive and re-expand, under a Divine breath, that flower of love which he believed for ever blasted!

This intoxication was of short duration; Maurice left it by a sudden movement of anger and despair. Like a bird mortally struck in free air, he fell back heavily upon the ground of reality. Unhappy mortal! he loved when it was too late; he had arrived too late at the gates of Paradise; he discovered happiness only in time to bid it an eternal adieu. His violent nature was re-animating for a last time; he burst forth in

jealous imprecations against Sir Edward, who had robbed him of life; in the frenzy of his grief he hardly spared Madeleine. He recalled the late bearing of his cousin; he saw her smiling upon the baronet, who looked fondly upon her, and he felt his breast torn by all the tortures of hell. He had not even the consolation of saying to himself that he had perhaps deceived himself. Even though he had not observed these two young people—even though he had not followed with an uneasy eye the progress of their mutual passion, the vague malady which he had suffered should have already enlightened him; the martyrdom that he endured at this hour would have cried plainly enough that Madeleine loved Sir Edward. He walked fiercely in his room, when he suddenly stopped, ashamed of his frenzy. He looked into his own heart, and blushed with confusion.

'Why complain, miserable one?' exclaimed he, bowing his head. 'Only just escaped from the muddy stream where thou hast wasted thy youth, thou complainest because thou art not loved; thou art incapable of seeing that a noble heart, a spotless virtue, a conscience that has never weakened, may be preferred to thee! What hast thou done to merit that tenderness which appears to thee to-day the supreme good? For more than two years thou hast had this treasure under thy hand, what hast thou done to render thyself worthy of it? Thou hast misunderstood her, thou hast contemned her, thou hast trampled her under foot, and now thou rebellest against thyself at the thought that another should possess her! As a reward for the insults with which thou hast overwhelmed her, it does not satisfy thee that the adorable creature that God has placed under thy care, has drawn thee from the bottom of an abyss, that she has washed the stains from thy soul and directed thy steps with consecrated thoughts. As a price of the insane affronts that thou hast lavished upon her, as a recompense for thy harshness, for thy infamous conduct, it would seem to thee that her love could not be too much. Ah! be dumb, remain in thy obscurity, and thank Heaven, which has given thee the grace of being able to love.'

Maurice had never wept with so much bitterness upon the mistakes of his past life; never, at the remembrance of his errors, had he shed such bitter, such burning tears; never had remorse for ill-spent days weighed upon him with greater force. He measured for the first time the extent of his ruin; his mind had just opened to the sentiment of happiness which he had had under his hand and had not been able to seize.

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'At this hour,' said he, 'if I had always followed, like Sir Edward, the inflexible line of duty, I should be under the roof of my ancestors, near to Madeleine, who would love me perhaps, for I should have remained worthy of her love.'

True love is humble, resigned, ever ready for sacrifice. What could Maurice offer to his cousin? What could he do, in spite of his courage and perseverance, in spite of the favour that his works enjoyed? Even supposing that this favour would be durable, he could only provide for her a sorry and limited existence. In espousing Sir Edward, Madeleine would re-assume in society the rank which belonged to her, and which she ought never to have left. If she felt herself drawn towards him by a sentiment of affection, however feeble it might be, should Maurice oppose it? Was it not his duty, on the contrary, to encourage it by every means in his power, and to sacrifice everything for Madeleine's happiness? He did not hesitate herein; his part was immediately chosen.

Sorrowful and silent, but without ill-humour, he passed the evening with his cousin in accordance with his usual custom. By one of those contrasts frequent in all friendships, the young German was animated this evening by a lively gaiety; Maurice sorrowfully observed it, but, with an appearance of smiling resignation. He did not solicit a word, he did not seek a glance that might weaken his resolution. But, when about to retire, he asked Madeleine to seat herself at the piano and sing 'The Adieu,' that melody of Schubert which had, on a previous evening so profoundly moved him. The young girl complied with good grace to this fancy. Never, in singing, had she appeared more touching. When she had finished, Maurice rose, took in his own the hands of his cousin, bore them respectfully to his lips, then left the room to relieve, in solitude, his heart of the load which oppressed it.

'You are sad, Monsieur Maurice! my young master, what troubles you?' said Ursule, meeting him in the ante-chamber.

'It is nothing, good Ursule,' responded Maurice, controlling himself. 'You know that for some time my sorrows are not serious. So, as to this, embrace me; I am sure that will do me good.'

Ursule threw herself upon the neck of her foster-brother, who clasped her into his arms. Once alone, Maurice could no longer contain himself; he allowed his despair to burst out in sobs, to liberate itself in rivulets of tears: it was the last tribute that he paid to human weakness. The next day, rising at daylight, he bent over his table, and there, that

nothing should be lacking at the immolation of his hopes, stifling the cries of his spirit, crushing back the love in his breast, he wrote with a firm hand:

'Madeleine, I have kept my promise. You asked me to remain two years with you; the term indicated by yourself expired several months since. You asked of me two years of abnegation and devotedness, and you have taken no role. You have done for me more than I for you. In making me recognize the value of work, the grandeur and holiness of duty, you have almost effaced in me the memory of my mistakes. Whatever be the future that God reserves for me, I shall have for you only an eternal sentiment of gratefulness and words of blessing; but I do not wish, nay, I ought no longer to accept the sacrifice to which you have resigned yourself with so much courage: it would be, on my part, a gross egoism which I should never forgive myself. It is more than I that is now concerned, it is you and your happiness. Sir Edward loves you: he is worthy of your love. He will assure you the rank that you deserve. He has for me, I doubt not, a sincere affection; he will take upon himself the responsibility of acquitting my debt towards you. Adieu, therefore. I am going away. Do not be troubled about my destiny. In whatever place I find myself, my work will suffice for my needs. Never fear that I shall fall back into that utter darkness from whence you have drawn me; a mysterious star will ever be my guide in the way that you have opened for me. If my strength weakens, if discouragement again possesses me, it will suffice, in order to raise me again, to look into the recesses of my heart. I shall find there your image. I go to see once more the chateau of my ancestors; it is a legitimate reparation that I owe to the memory of the chevalier. I wish to reveal myself pure and regenerated in those places that have seen me dishonoured and degraded. My father died far from me, without pressing mine in his failing hands. This holy pilgrimage will finish appeasing the trouble of my conscience. Then I shall go with a firm step wherever God pleases to lead me. Once more, adieu, Madeleine; be happy, and while I bless the remembrance of the days that we have passed together, this remembrance cannot be very bitter to you. Your brother,

MAURICE.'

He folded this letter, traced upon the envelope the sweet name that should thenceforth fill his whole life, and put it in plain sight upon the mantel-piece. At this moment, he perceived Marceau and his wife,

who were already at work, near the cradle of their children; he saluted them with an affectionate gesture. Having contemplated with an envious eye, for a few minutes, the peace and happiness of this little menage, he busied himself with the preparations for his departure: this occupied him a quarter of an hour at the most. When all was ready, he buckled around his blouse his belt of patent-leather, put upon his back the knapsack that contained his whole fortune, seized with one hand the staff of the journeyman; then, having cast a tender glance around the little room, into which he had entered hardened by egotism, stained by idleness, rendered prematurely old by debauchery, he went out regenerated by work, rejuvenated by love, sanctified by sacrifice.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### HOME AGAIN.

While he remained in Paris, his sorrow was mixed with secret irritation. He felt the generous resignation that had impelled him to leave Madeleine, falter within him. It seemed there was, in the atmosphere of the great city, a remnant of the fatal influence to which he formerly had been subjected. Once outside of Paris, when he felt his chest dilate in the vivifying air of the country, in face of nature, his anger [was appeased, his heart was softened, and he permitted himself to be dominated wholly by an unique sentiment, his love for Madeleine. In the time of his stormy life, which he foolishly took for an earnest life, every time that one of his desires was opposed or could be gratified only after an obstinate struggle, resistance awoke in him spite or hatred. He could not understand love without possession; he might have smiled in pity if one had told him that the heart could taste in love a happiness independent of the object loved. Now, alone with his own thoughts, he realized the grandeur and the holiness of a sentiment that he had never before understood, of which he had embraced hitherto only the grosser image. He withdrew from Madeleine; his heart bled at this separation, and yet he flavoured his grief with pleasant thoughts. In his voluntary isolation, in the exile to which he resigned himself, he experienced a joy more vivid and profound than in the intoxications of his satiated passions. He was not loved, but he felt himself worthier of being loved, and the consciousness of his moral worth inspired in him a legitimate pride. He was not loved, but he applauded himself for the sacrifice

that he had just made for the woman that he loved; and he found, in this very sacrifice, a joy that it was not in the power of any one to rob him of. In his pilgrimage to Valtravers he was not guided solely by the desire to acquit himself with respect to the memory of his father; he wished also to see again the place where he had met Madeleine for the first time, and bless the imprint of her steps. He wished to breathe the air that she had embalmed with her presence; to run through the places in which he had listened to her voice; it was for him a last and supreme form of gratitude.

He walked with head erect, breathing the air with dilated lungs. The appreciation of the beauties of nature, long deadened in his heart, was at last awakened. It approached the last days of May; the sun smiled upon the earth. All the undulations of the hill sides, all the caprices of the sky, all the accidents of the scenery, were, for Maurice, a source of unexpected joys. To witness his naive enchantment, it might have been said that he saw, for the first time, the wonders of creation. The austere fatigues of this pedestrian journey were sweeter to him than all the excursions made not long since in the bottom of an indolent caleche, at the gallop of horses. The halts, at evening, in the little inns, the departures at the early dawn, the rencontres at the common table, the salutations exchanged upon the road, the chats with children upon the stone steps before the door, were, for him, so many poetic episodes that renewed at each instant the interest in his pilgrimage, at the same time initiating him into the practice of equality.

Last of all, a final moral revolution was destined to crown all the others.

Madeleine had succeeded in re-animating the religious sentiment in the heart of Maurice, but she had ever vainly supplicated him to have recourse to prayer, and invoke, in his woes, divine consolation. Whatever she might say to him, he had never consented to set foot in a church. It was left to grief to bring him back by an insensible grade, to the faith and to the religion that he had hitherto railed at. Every sincere grief lifts us towards Heaven. Maurice proved it. Walking through a village that was found on his way, he passed before a church; impelled by an irresistible instinct, without being importuned, without deliberating within himself, he entered. It was one of those poor churches that God is said to prefer to sumptuous and gilded temples. The sun shone softly through the lowered blinds; wild flowers were scattered upon the

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steps of the altar; here and there, upon the floor, some women, some old people were kneeling in the subdued light. Maurice sank upon his knees and prayed. He prayed to obtain pardon from his father for his errors, to obtain from Heaven happiness for Madeleine.

At length, after fifteen days of solitary travel, he traversed, without being recognized, the little village adjoining Valtravers. His costume was sufficient to assure his incognito; besides, in that assured step, in that proud and serene glance, in the calmness and dignity of that noble and manly figure, how could anyone recognize the young man that had been seen, three years previously, passing through the town like an outcast?

Who could be able to tell what emotions attacked him, when he saw, an hour later, looming above the horizon, the leafy shades that had screened his cradle, when he set foot upon the edge of the forest, when he plunged into the mysterious depths that he had so often traversed in company with his father and the marquise, where Madeleine was revealed to him? Finding himself again, overflowing with love and life, in those beautiful places where, three years previously, he had brought only a sentiment of his degradation, his first movement was to cry out to Nature that he was young again, that he could love, that he loved; his regenerated soul was lifted up in holy raptures. He proceeded slowly; souvenirs sprang up before him like larks from the meadows. Under the shade of that oak he had reposed at the chevalier's side; under the silver foliage of this poplar he had dreamed away a day, listening to the nascent murmurs, counting the incipient palpitations of youth just starting into life within him. At a turn in the path, he recognized the place where, one autumn evening, he had met his cousin. He recalled all the details of that poetic evening: he recollected also that a year later, on the day of his departure, he had found Madeleine seated at the same place.

'Ah! unhappy one, what demon drove you away?' cried he sadly. 'She was even then beautiful and charming, like a celestial warning, like the image of happiness that you were leaving behind you. Had you then but taken her by the hand and retraced your steps!'

Day was declining. Worn out by his emotions, Maurice had thrown himself upon the greensward. He rose and turned his steps towards the chateau. As he did not know the people that inhabited it; not very anxious, be it understood, to see and recognize them, he but wished, through the bars of the gate, to cast a devout glance into the park;

he wished to bid a final adieu to the Eden from which he was for ever exiled.

He walked beside the wall that enclosed the park, as far as to the gate, and remained for a long time with his forehead pressed against the palings. Mechanically he opened the gate; by an impulse of the heart, he entered. The park was deserted, the shades of evening were beginning to fall. Maurice heard only the murmur of the wind among the leaves, the cries of birds hiding in their nests, the noise of the sand under his feet. Pushing aside the thick branches, he advanced with a furtive step. At a bend in the path, when the facade was about to appear, he stopped, held his breath, crossed his arms upon his chest as if to quell its rising emotion. Finally he looked. Could he believe the evidence of his own eyes? Was it not a dream, a mirage, a hallucination of his over-excited brain? He wanted to cry out, but his voice died upon his lips. The stick that he carried escaped from his hands, his limbs refused to support him, and, to prevent himself from falling, he was obliged to lean against a tree. There before him, twenty paces distant, seated upon the perron, in the subdued light of the last rays of the setting sun, while two children, well known to Maurice, played upon the lawn, Madeleine, Sir Edward, Pierre Marceau and his wife, were chatting together. Suddenly Madeleine arose, and Maurice saw her advancing towards him smiling, as serene, as calm, as if the occurrence were the simplest and most natural thing in the world.

'*Mon ami*, we were waiting for you,' said she.

And, taking his arm, the young girl drew him gently towards the baronet, Therese and Marceau, who, on their side, came to meet him. They pressed his hands in silence; not a word was uttered. Every heart was moved; every lip was mute.

'Oh, my friends!' said Maurice, at last, in a trembling voice, stopping at the foot of the perron and throwing around him a confused glance, 'Oh my friends! what has happened? What is happening? Speak, answer me. Have I dreamed of grief and despair, or am I now indeed dreaming of happiness?'

The faces which surrounded him answered only by a gentle smile. Supported by Madeleine, he ascended the steps of the perron. Already all the servants were assembled in the hall. Maurice recognized them all; all had seen him born and grown up.

'My children,' said Madeleine to them, 'here is your young master, who has come back among you.'



They pressed about him with love and respect, while Ursule hastened to unbuckle the straps of the sack that he carried upon his back. At the same instant, it was announced that dinner was ready. Followed by Sir Edward and the Marceaus, Madeleine took his arm, led him into the dining-hall, where nothing had been changed, and made him sit, in his artisan's dress, at the place which his father formerly occupied. Though the table was loaded with every hereditary luxury to which Maurice had been accustomed in youth, the repast was short and silent. Maurice retained to the end the attitude of a man who knowing not whether he is asleep or awake, fears lest by a too sudden gesture or imprudent word, he should cause the enchantment which he witnesses to vanish. At the end of a quarter of an hour, Madeleine rose, and, leaving the group of *convives*, directed her steps towards the park in company with her cousin, who allowed himself to be led like a child. Having arrived at a grassy eminence, the young girl seated herself first, and caused Maurice to sit beside her.

It was one of those beautiful evenings which seem to double the value of happiness. While one part of the sky was even yet purpled with sleeping fires, at the other limit of the horizon the moon was rising in a lake of azure, and mounting slowly over the tops of the trees, whose foliage glistened like silver in its pale rays. The nightingale sang deliciously amid the thick branches; in the depths of the woods was heard the distant sound of the cascade.

'Oh, *mon ami*,' said Madeleine at last, in a voice surpassing in melody the song of the nightingale and sweeter than the fresh night breeze, 'I have loved you from the day when I saw you here for the first time. You had need of regenerating yourself by passing through poverty, labour and abnegation. I understood it, and I wished to share the proofs that I imposed upon you. These proofs are ended, Maurice; will you forgive me?'

Maurice felt his very soul melt like a grain of incense, and exhale towards Madeleine in silent adoration. He knelt at the foot of the little eminence upon which his cousin was sitting. That pure being bent towards him her sweet face, and there, under the light of the silent stars, their lips met in a chaste kiss.

It is hardly necessary to state, now, that Madeleine's poverty was only a pious falsehood. She had not lost her lawsuit. She had deceived Maurice in order to save him. I do not wish to describe what passed in the heart of Madeleine while Maurice effected

his rehabilitation. Such a recital is best left to delicate souls; as to the others, they would not comprehend it. The young chevalier had just found his friends of Paris under the roof of his ancestors.

'They have been witnesses of your struggles and efforts; it is right,' said Madeleine, 'that they should be present at the moment when you receive the recompense that you have so well merited. What Sir Edward loved in me was our poverty; our happiness will console him.'

A month later Maurice and Madeleine were married without noise and ostentation at Neuville-les-Bois, in presence of their friends, peasants and domestics. Having enjoyed for several days the sight of their sweet pleasures, Pierre Marceau set out for Paris with his wife and children. In vain Madeleine essayed to retain them—in vain Maurice offered to keep them at the chateau, where they would easily find employment for their activity and their intelligence.

'You have found your true place,' Marceau wisely answered; 'permit me to keep mine. In spite of the friendship that unites us, I feel that I should disturb your happiness. I fear nothing from your pride; the work that we have shared together has established between us an equality that nothing would be able to change; but the society in the midst of which you are going to live would refuse to understand it, and its astonishment would be for me a silent reproach that I am anxious to spare both of us.'

The little family set out loaded with tokens of affection. At the end of a month Sir Edward departed on his tour. 'Carefully watch over your happiness,' said he to Maurice, at the moment of bidding him adieu; 'it is a delicate plant, that needs vigilant care. It has grown up, under a balmy air; take care to protect it against the storms which might break it.' Then turning towards Madeleine, he wished to address a few words of adieu to her, but he was troubled, his eyes moistened, and the young wife felt a tear fall upon the hand that he pressed sorrowfully to his lips.

My task is ended. Happy existences are not related. Maurice was thenceforth out of danger, and no longer needed even fortitude. Though work was no longer a necessity, yet he was not idle; he busied himself in doing good, he disseminated his wealth around him. Madeleine was paid with usury for her devotion. No cloud appeared to disturb the serenity of their mutual tenderness. As to Ursule, whatever Madeleine might say, she persisted in believing that

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her young mistress had really lost her lawsuit, and that Maurice had found in wood-carving the means of buying back the domain of his ancestors. Maurice ever retained for his young wife an exalted feeling of gratitude; frequently it happened that in an intoxicated sense of happiness he blessed

her. '*Mon ami*,' she replied in such cases, 'it is not I that you should thank; I only indicated the way in which you were to go. It is work that you should bless; for it is through it that you have found again youth, love and happiness.'

THE END.